







"'We are the Jolly Friends of Fardale,' replied a disguised voice, 'and we want you.'" See page 109.

FRANK MERRIWELL'S SCHOOL DAYS

BY

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FRANK MERRIWELL'S SCHOOL DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK MAKES HIS BOW.

"Get out!"

Thump! A shrill howl of pain.

"Stop it! That's my dog!"

"Oh, is it? Then you ought to be kicked, too! Take that for your impudence!"

A blow from an open hand sent the boyish owner of the whimpering poodle staggering to the ground, while paper bags of popcorn flew from his basket and scattered their snowy contents around.

"That was a cowardly blow!"

The haughty, over-dressed lad who had knocked the little popcorn vender down, after kicking the barefooted boy's dog, turned sharply as he heard these words, and found himself face to face with a youth of an age not far from his own.

As they stood thus, eying each other steadily, the two boys presented a strong contrast. The one who had lately been so free with foot and hand had a dark, handsome, cruel face. He was dressed in a plaid suit of a very pronounced pattern, had patent leather shoes on his feet, and a crushed felt hat on his head, wore several rings on his fingers, and had a heavy gold double chain

strung across his vest, while the pin in his red necktie was set with a "sparkler" that might or might not be genuine.

The other lad was modestly dressed in a suit of brown, wore well-polished shoes and a stylish straw hat, but made no display of jewelry. His face was frank, open, and winning, but the merry light that usually dwelt in his brown eyes was now banished by a look of scorn, and the set of his jaw told that he could be firm and dauntless.

This was Frank Merriwell, who had just stepped from the train at Fardale. Frank had noticed the other boy on the train, and wondered if he, too, were on his way to Fardale, but the haughty, exclusive carriage of the stranger had prevented any attempt at making an acquaintance.

Now, however, Frank had no hesitation in addressing the fellow who had struck the popcorn vender.

"Who are you, and what right have you to meddle?" demanded the haughty youth.

"My name is Merriwell, and I have a right to meddle because you just struck one who is smaller and weaker than yourself. I may be a little fresh, but it's my way, and I can't help it; I always take the side of the under dog."

"Do you mean to call me a dog? Take care! My name is Bartley Hodge, and my father——"

"Never mind your family history; I don't care if your father is William McKinley. You kicked that dog from pure viciousness, and you struck the boy because he dared to say a word in defense of his own. If he had been your size you wouldn't have hit him quite so readily."

"I may take a fancy to hit you."

"You'll tip the beam at fifteen pounds more than I, but you are at liberty to hit me if you can. If you try it, I'll agree to give you such a thrashing as you deserve, or my name's not Frank Merriwell."

Bartley Hodge hesitated. He was angry, but there was something about the bearing of the boy in brown that made him fancy Merriwell would be a hard customer to handle.

"Bah!" he cried, snapping his fingers. "I wouldn't lower myself to fight with you."

He turned and walked away, while Frank helped the owner of the dog gather up his spilled corn.

"Say, you're a dandy!" exclaimed the urchin, regarding Frank with admiring eyes. "That feller looked like he could eat you, but he couldn't bluff you a little bit. I'll bet you can do him!"

"Well, I don't know about that," laughed the boy in brown. "But I think I should have been able to make it rather interesting for him."

"Have you come here to attend the academy?"

"Yes."

"I guess that's what t'other feller's come for. He's gone to look after his baggage. There's the expressman down at the end of the platform. He will take you and your trunk to Snodd's for half a dollar."

"Who is Snodd?"

"Why, he lives down at the Cove, and he always keeps a lot of the fellers who come to git into the academy till after they are examined and accepted."

"Then to Snodd's I go, but I think I'll walk. How far is it?"

"A good mile."

"Just enough to stretch my legs after the long ride

on the train. I'll get the expressman to take over my trunk, and I'll give you a quarter to show me the way to Snodd's."

"Done!" cried the barefooted boy. "I'm your huckleberry!"

Frank sought the expressman, and gave him the trunk check, together with a quarter to pay him for moving the trunk, paying no heed to Bartley Hodge, who was regarding him with an insolent sneer. Then he returned to the young popcorn vender, who whistled to his poodle, and they started on their tramp from the station to Snodd's.

The station was situated on the outskirts of the village of Fardale, a place of not more than one thousand inhabitants. Fardale nestled among the hills which here reached down to the very seacoast, and, in the yellowish-blue haze of a warm spring afternoon, it looked a very pretty little place, indeed.

It had been Frank Merriwell's ambition to go to West Point, but Harton Merriwell's influence had not been powerful enough to induce the Congressman from their district to recommend Frank, there being at least a dozen other applicants, so, as the next best resort, the boy was sent to Fardale.

Fardale Military Academy was modeled as far as possible after the great school at West Point, and was in many respects a most successful imitation. The students at Fardale, however, were a little wilder and harder to manage than those who went to the Point, for the fathers of unruly and wayward sons often sent them to this private military academy to have them "toned down."

For all this, not every one could get into Fardale Academy, as every applicant was forced to pass an ex-

amination, and not a few of those who came to Snodd's as candidates for admission failed from utter unworthiness, being usually advised to return home and attend common school another year or more.

Frank Merriwell grew jolly as he tramped along the road with the boy and dog for companions. He seemed to forget his encounter with Bartley Hodge till there came the rumble of wheels, and, looking round, he saw the express wagon coming, with Hodge seated on his trunk behind the driver.

"Here comes that other feller," said the barefooted lad. "He don't walk any, he don't. He's goin' to the academy sure, and I bet you and him has trouble."

"It is possible we may," admitted Frank, very quietly. "I am always making enemies, and I have started in first-rate here."

Bartley Hodge's eyes glittered as he saw the two boys and the dog. He reached over and appropriated the driver's whip, and, as the express wagon rolled past, he leaned out and gave the poodle a cut that sent the unfortunate creature rolling and howling into the ditch.

In an instant the jolly look had vanished from Frank Merriwell's face, and he started forward a step, as if he thought of rushing after the wagon and dragging the vicious youngster out into the dust of the road.

"Now I know he is a coward and a bully!" muttered Frank.

The barefooted boy went down on his knees in the ditch and gathered up the poodle, caressing and patting the whining creature.

"Oh, if I was big enough, I'd lick that feller!" he cried, his eyes filling with angry tears.

"Never mind," said Frank. "I'll do it for you."

"Will you, honest?"

"Well, I'll do my best."

"He's bigger than you."

"I know it."

"I'd just like to see the scrap," said the urchin. "Can't you fix it so I'll be there? My name's Tad Jones, and I bring milk to Snodd's ev'ry morning."

"Well, Tad, I'll see what can be done for you. Hello! I suppose that is the academy?"

"Yes, that's it."

Below them lay a beautiful, sheltered cove, with wooded hills beyond. At the western extremity of the cove were the academy and surrounding buildings, the chapel, gymnasium, mess hall and riding hall.

Frank was most agreeably surprised, for, as Fardale Academy was a private school, he had not looked for anything so pretentious.

He stood surveying the place for some minutes, questioning Tad Jones, who was ready with answers for everything, and then, having Snodd's pointed out to him, a big, old-fashioned house on the nearer side of the Cove, he gave the lad the promised quarter and started down the road alone.

Little did Frank Merriwell dream of the struggles, trials, defeats, disgraces, battles and triumphs that lay before him, and little recked he of the new life he was to lead at Fardale.

CHAPTER II.

DUN AT SNODD'S.

It was not far from sunset when Frank reached Snodd's; he found his trunk at the door, and Snodd himself was there to meet him.

Mr. Snodd was a lanky, farmerish-looking man, with an ill-trimmed wisp of a beard on his chin. His clothes showed he was in the habit of making an effort to keep "dressed up," but didn't know how. He squinted keenly at Frank as the lad came up and asked:

"Are you Mr. Snodd?"

"Wal, yas, I guess I be," replied Snodd, as if somewhat in doubt himself. "Be you the feller what owns this trunk?"

"Yes."

"Goin' to the academy?"

"If I am admitted."

"Hum! Wall, you didn't ride over from the station?"

"No; I preferred to walk."

"Yas; saved a quarter that way. Now I don't know's we'll be able to keep you here. An't but one room left, an' you won't want to pay what I ask."

"How do you know?" asked Frank, in surprise. "What gave you that impression?"

"Wal, I kinder cal'lated so from what I've heerd of ye. I never let nobody beat me down."

"How much do you ask for the room and board by the week?"

"Four dollars, and that is cheap as——"

"I'll take it, and here is the money for one week in advance."

Mr. Snodd gasped, slowly taking the money Frank promptly handed over.

"I kinder guess there's some mistake somewhere," he said. "Feller that come ahead said you'd try to beat me—said you was so blamed mean you walked over, 'stead of payin' the expressman another quarter to fetch ye."

"So Mr. Hodge has begun thus soon," said Frank, grimly. "He was right; I did walk over, instead of paying a quarter to be brought by the expressman, but I wanted to stretch my legs, and I gave Tad Jones a quarter to show me the way here."

"Eh! Is that so! Paid a quarter an' walked! Wal, I guess you an't so gol derved mean as ye might be. An' you've paid a week in advance, which t'other feller an't done. I guess you're all right, an' if you'll ketch holt, we'll have your trunk upstairs in two shakes."

They carried in the trunk, and Mr. Snodd put his end down to introduce a buxom, smiling girl who appeared in the hall.

"This is my darter Belinda; Belinda, this is a new academy feller. What'd you say your name was?"

Frank gave his name and acknowledged the introduction, after which the trunk was carried upstairs and deposited in a small, neat room, the one window of which looked out on the academy building.

"The bell will be rung for supper purty quick," said Mr. Snodd. "Better git ready to come down."

Then Snodd left him, and he immediately proceeded to wash and make himself presentable.

While thus engaged he heard a familiar voice outside, and he knew Bart Hodge was near at hand.

Frank opened his door slightly and peeped out.

Hodge had met Belinda at the head of the stairs, and, considering himself something of a masher, he was straightway doing his best to "make a hit" with the girl.

From his position Frank could see them plainly, and he also saw that the doors of several other rooms were slightly ajar, and he could see more than one curious, boyish eye peering from behind.

Hodge was being watched by Snodd's boarders.

"You have a charming place here," said Bart, in his most fetching way.

"Do you really think so?" smiled Belinda.

"Sure. But it's not half so charming as you are yourself. I was afraid it would be rather dull here, but now I am sure I shall find it pleasant and agreeable."

"Hodge is putting up a pretty bluff," thought Frank.

Belinda blushed and looked down. She had a pitcher of water in her hands, having been on her way with it to one of the rooms.

"We always try to make it pleasant for all our boarders," she said.

"But I trust you will try to make it exceptionally pleasant for me," insinuated Bart, drawing a bit closer. "A moonlight ramble along the shore would be charming—with you."

"You are rather bold."

"I can't help it. Belinda—what a sweet name—how poetic! You have the brown eyes of a fawn. The sight of those tempting lips makes me burn with a desire to taste their dewy freshness. Belinda, give me a kiss! Give me just one, and I will——"

"Get out!"

Splash! The contents of the water pitcher struck him

full in the face just as he was attempting to take the coveted kiss. With a gurgle of astonishment, he sat down heavily on the floor, gasping and dazed, while Belinda flitted away, laughing merrily.

"Oh, Belinda!" shouted one of the eavesdroppers. "How could you be so cruel!"

And a roar of laughter came from half-a-dozen rooms.

Realizing that he had been seen and heard, Hodge scrambled to his feet and bolted for his own room, dripping with water.

Laughing at his foe's discomfiture, Frank finished making his toilet, and he had been ready some time when the supper bell rang.

The boys trooped down to the dining-room, where Snodd introduced Frank all around, ending by presenting him to Mrs. Snodd, a large, jolly-looking woman.

Hodge did not show up till the lads were seated and had begun to eat, Belinda serving. When Hodge appeared, the delay was explained, for he had changed his clothes throughout, and removed all traces of the ducking he had received at the hands of Belinda.

His face, however, was flushed, for he could not fail to note the sly grins of the boys as they were introduced. Frank was very grave, bowing slightly to Hodge, although he received no more than a cutting stare in return.

Being something of a ventriloquist, Frank resolved to have some fun with his enemy, so he made one of the other lads, Winslow by name, seem to observe:

"It is a very wet day, Mr. Hodge."

This caused the others to grin still more broadly, while Hodge stiffly returned:

"I hadn't noticed it, Mr. Winslow."

"What are you speaking to me for?" demanded Winslow. "I didn't address you."

"Yes, you did," returned Bart, sharply.

"You are a—a—mistaken," said Winslow, who had a peppery temper.

Immediately Frank made another fellow by the name of Gray seem to inquire:

"Mr. Hodge, don't you think Belinda is a sweet name—very poetic?"

"I don't know as it's any of your business what I think!" snapped Bart.

"Who are you talking to?" asked Ned Gray, as Hodge glared at him.

"I am speaking to you, as you had the insolence to speak insultingly to me first."

"I didn't say a word to you!"

"You did!"

Ned Gray looked as if he longed to punch Bart's head; but at this moment Frank made Barney Mulloy seem to observe:

"Whin do yez ixpict to take thot ramble along th' shore in the moonloight, Mishter Hodge?"

"I'll take a ramble with you, you Irish chump!" cried Bart, now thoroughly enraged; "and I'll punch your head, too!"

"Phwat's thot?" cried Barney, promptly rising to his feet. "Is it mesilf ye are afther addressin' yer remarks to, ye spalpane? Oi'll break yer face!"

"Boys! boys!" cried Mrs. Snodd, in amazement and alarm. "What's got into you? You are behaving in a most ungentlemanly manner."

"That's so, by gum!" agreed Snodd. "Never knowed

no fellers to act like this at the table before sence we've bin taking applicants to board."

"Ixchuse me," said Barney, as he sat down; "but it shtarted me blud a bit to hev thot crayther call me a chump whin Oi nivver spoke a wurrud to him in all me loife."

"Never mind him," Frank made Belinda appear to say. "He's in love, you know, and——"

"I won't stay here to be insulted!" cried Bartley Hodge, as he angrily tore out of the room, slamming the door behind him, but failing to shut out the roar of laughter that broke from the boys.

CHAPTER III.

A COWARDLY ASSAULT.

"Av all th' big shtuffs Oi ivver saw, thot felly takes th' cake!" declared Barney Mulloy.

"He didn't seem to like it when you asked him if he didn't think Belinda a sweet name, Gray," cried Sam Winslow.

"But I didn't ask him anything of the kind," rather warmly asserted Ned Gray. "I never opened my mouth to him till he spoke to me."

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed several of the others. "We heard you."

"I tell you you're mistaken; but Winslow fired the first shot when he said it was a very wet day."

"But I never said it, you know," cried Winslow. "I heard somebody say so, but it wasn't I."

"If this keeps up, Barney will deny he said anything about taking a ramble along the shore in the moonlight," said Ross Kent.

"An' it's th' truth Oi'd be shpakin' av Oi did say so. It's nivver a wurrud av th' sort did Oi say to th' b'y."

The boys looked at each other, greatly mystified, failing to observe the merry twinkle in Frank's eyes. As for Frank, he was not going to give away the trick just then, as it might afford him some sport in the future. He felt that he had squared with Hodge for trying to prejudice Snodd against him; but there was another account to settle. He did not forget that he had promised Tad Jones that he would give Bart a thrashing.

"I don't think one of you spoke to Hodge at all," smiled Frank. "I'm sure I didn't hear any one of you say a word to him until he spoke to you."

Frank spoke the literal truth, but the others were inclined to regard it as a joke. In order to divert their thoughts and prevent a further discussion of the matter, Frank told a funny story that seemed applicable to the occasion, setting the whole table in a roar of laughter, and causing Hodge to be forgotten for the time.

Being a born diplomat, Frank decided that then was the accepted time to make himself solid at Snodd's, which he proceeded to do by keeping up a string of funny stories and witty sayings that convulsed the boys and made them decide that he must be a jolly good fellow.

When supper was over and they trooped from the dining-room, Frank was surrounded and carried off to Ned Gray's and Ross Kent's room, where there was a little "gathering."

"Make yourself at home, Merriwell," invited Gray, offering the only chair in the room. "Kent and I take turns at this when we do not have company. When we have company, we sit on the floor and let our feet hang down. Be patient till I produce the baleful nicotian."

He plunged headlong into his trunk, and soon produced cigarettes, which he passed around, observing:

"Life really isn't worth living, fellows; have a cigarette with me."

The cigarettes were of the big, fat, Turkish variety.

"I seldom smoke," Frank declared, "but I will join you now."

As he reached out his hand, he noticed that one of the cigarettes seemed of its own accord to slip into his fingers, and he instantly decided that it had been "forced"

upon him by Gray, as a sleight-of-hand performer forces a card

Instantly Merriwell was suspicious, feeling sure that the boys had gathered to see some kind of a trick played on him.

"Fire away," directed Ned Gray, placing some matches on the stand. "Smoke up, boys!"

He set the example by lighting his own cigarette.

Frank was not backward, but he took care not to draw too hard on his.

Suddenly a dog was heard whining at the door.

"Get out!" shouted Gray, flinging a slipper against the door and settling back comfortably on the bed.

The dog barked angrily.

"Somebody drive that creature away, please," said Frank. "Dogs make me very nervous."

Ned placed his cigarette on the edge of the stand and went to the door.

This was even better than Frank had expected.

It had been his intention to attract the attention of the boys to the door long enough for him to light another cigarette with his, and to fling the one just lighted out of the open window. Now he proceeded to exchange his for Gray's, and no one observed the swap.

"There isn't any dog here," said Ned, in disgust, as he closed the door and came back. "The creature must be out doors somewhere."

He picked up his cigarette and gave a long pull at it. Sizz—bang!

The cigarette burst into flame, and with an exclamation of astonishment and dismay, Ned flung it to the floor, where it lay and sizzled, while a long, green snake seemed to writhe and crawl out of it.

"Behold!" cried Frank, soberly, rising to his feet—"behold this solemn warning! That shows what cigarettes lead to—delusions, red fire, jim-jams. I swear off on the spot."

Out of the window he flung his own cigarette.

"Well, I'll swear off myself if I ever make another bungle of that sort," declared Ned, rubbing his eyes and flushing as he heard the laughter of the boys. "You're the first fellow to come here and escape this dose, Merriwell."

"Then I have much to be thankful for," said Frank, smiling, as he saw the green snake crumble to ashes.

"Oi say, b'ys," said Barney, "are yez in fer a bit av foragin' this noight?"

"Foraging?"

"Yis."

"Where? What do you mean?"

"It's a roight foine lot av coider Snodd has botthled in the celly, an' Oi know a way to rache it."

"Cider!" gurgled Ross Kent, striking an attitude. "A nectar for the gods!"

"A necktie fer th' gods!" exclaimed Barney. "Oi niver hearrud it called thot before."

"How can we reach this glorious cider?" asked Sam Winslow.

"By th' roolway dure," replied Barney. "Oi know a way to open it."

"Then, it's cider—good, old-fashioned cider—will wet our parched tongues this eve. Are you with us, Merriwell?"

"Yis," demanded Barney, "are ye wid us, or ag'in us?"

"I trust you will excuse me this time, as I am going over to the academy this evening to see Lieutenant Gor-

dan. Under ordinary circumstances, I would be more than delighted to be with you."

In vain they urged him, and they discovered that Frank was one of the kind of boys who are not easily coaxed or driven against their will.

Frank listened a while to the plans of the boys, and then he begged to be excused, and left them.

He soon left the house and made his way over to the academy, where he sought and found Lieutenant Gordan.

Arrangements had been made by letter, so that his coming was expected, and in a short time they were seated in a quiet room, where his preliminary examination was begun.

In less than an hour, the lieutenant said:

"I scarcely think there is any doubt but you will pass all right, Merriwell; still, it is well enough to brush up on certain points, to make sure."

Then he told Frank what studies to take up, escorted him to the limit of the academy grounds, and bade him good-night and good-luck.

Frank was feeling light-hearted and well-satisfied as he turned his face toward Snodd's. At last he had reached Fardale, and there seemed no obstacle in the way of his admission to the academy.

True he had made an enemy of Bart Hodge, but he was not afraid of Hodge, and he did not anticipate much trouble from the fellow.

He knew little of Hodge's vindictive, vengeful nature.

Frank whistled a merry tune as he walked briskly along.

Suddenly, without the least warning, some one leaped upon him from the shadow of some bushes at the road-

side, and he received a blow on the head that sent him staggering.

Before he could recover, his unknown assailant was on him, and they grappled.

The fellow quickly pressed a handkerchief over Frank's mouth, nose, and eyes, at the same time bearing him backward to the ground.

The handkerchief gave out a strong, pungent odor that seemed piercing to Frank's brain, and robbed him of what little strength the blow had left him.

His resistance was feeble and ineffectual, and he felt his senses beginning to reel.

When he tried to cry out, no more than a murmuring groan escaped his lips.

Bright lights broke like rockets before his eyes, and he heard sweet music, mingled with the tolling of heavy bells.

Then these sounds drifted away—away—away——

CHAPTER IV.

BARTLEY HODGE'S LITTLE GAME.

Mr. John Snodd was preparing to retire for the night when Bartley Hodge put in an appearance and drew him aside, whispering in his ear:

"Mr. Snodd, there have been burglars in your cellar to-night."

"What's that?" shouted the man, in astonishment. "Burglars! You're foolin'!"

"Sh! Easy!" cautioned Bart. "I am not fooling. I am in earnest. I saw them slip out by the rollway door. There were several of them, and all carried something."

"Wal, I'll investigate this right off. I'll——"

"If you waste time that way, you may lose them all," said Bart. "I followed one of them, and I think I can take you to him now."

"Ye do, hey? Then, by gum! I'm with ye! Jest wait till I git my old gun."

In a few seconds Snodd was ready with the old-fashioned musket. Hodge advised him to take an unlighted lantern, which might be needed, and when this was secured they started out, taking the road toward the Cove.

Bart moved swiftly and with confidence, urging Snodd to hurry, for the man was inclined to hang back and be cautious.

"I don't care about runnin' up ag'in a gang of burglars," he said.

"There's no danger of that," assured Bart. "Only ~~one~~ of them came this way."

Down near the shore Hodge suddenly paused and pointed to a dark figure lying on the ground at one side of the road.

"What's that?" he whispered.

Snodd's teeth chattered, as he cocked his gun and pointed it at the object.

"It's one of them burglars!" he said, excitedly. "If the critter jumps at us, I'll fix him!"

"Don't shoot!" cried Bart, catching the arm of the excited man. "I don't think he'll hurt us. He seems quiet enough."

Then the boy advanced boldly, yet with some show of caution, and halted near the prostrate form.

"Hello, you; what's the matter?" he asked. "Why don't you get up?"

There was no reply; the prostrate figure did not stir.

"Light your lantern, Mr. Snodd," advised Bart. "We'll see what's the matter with this fellow."

Snodd's fingers were so unsteady that he was forced to light three matches before he could light the lantern. After a while, however, he succeeded.

"Let me have the lantern," said Bart, as he took it from the man's hands. "This fellow smells as if he had been drinking, and I rather think that is the matter with him."

Snodd sniffed the air.

"By gum! you're right," he agreed. "It does smell that way. Mebbe he an't one of the buglars at all."

"Well, we'll soon find out. Take a look at him, Mr. Snodd, and see if you know him."

The light was flung full in the face of the prostrate individual, and both man and boy uttered exclamations.

"Great ginger!" cried Snodd, astounded. "It's that last feller that came here to go to the academy."

"That's so," said Hodge. "It's Merriwell. I wonder what the matter can be? Is he hurt, or has he been——"

"Whew!" sniffed Snodd. "Can't ye smell it? It's cider, sure as ye live! Why, here's a bottle—an' here's another! It's my own cider, too—some I put up six years ago. Here's a bottle that's broke. His clothes is wet with it! He's full of cider clean to ther nozzle! He's drunk!"

"Oh, no!" retorted Hodge, as if he could not believe such a thing possible. "He isn't drunk—he can't be!"

"I tell ye he is!" snapped Snodd, who was beginning to fume with rage. "He's stole my cider from the cellar, an' he's filled hisself chock-full of it. He's drunk as a lord!"

"I can hardly believe such a thing possible," came from Bart, as if he really were very reluctant to think it true.

"I wouldn't thought it of him myself," acknowledged Snodd. "He appeared like a purty respectable feller. But here's the proof, and this will cook him so he'll never git inter Fardale Academy. They don't take no young drunkards in there."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Bart Hodge suppressed a chuckle of satisfaction. In his treacherous heart he was crying:

"There, Mr. Frank Merriwell, I rather think I have fixed you this time!"

Snodd stirred Frank with his heavy boot, roughly commanding:

"Wake up, young feller—wake up, I say. Come, come! I an't goin' ter fool much with you, by gum! You'll pay fer this cider, an' then you'll pack your duds

an' git out of my house about as quick as you know how."

"He's dead to the world," said Bart. "He's apt to lay like this for hours. Better leave him here to sleep off his drunk."

"That's so," said Snodd. "I'll lock up the house, and then he will have to pound around a while before he gits in. Stole my cider, did he! Got full on my cider, did he! Wants ter go to Fardale Academy, does he! Wal! wal! wal!"

"Come," urged Bart, "let's leave him."

The man seemed rather reluctant. Once more he bent over Frank, and then he sniffed the air again, observing:

"Seems ter me I smell somethin' else besides cider."

"I don't see how that is possible," said Bart, nervously. "He is so saturated with cider that I can't smell anything else. Come on, Mr. Snodd."

"Just pick up these bottles of cider. I an't goin' to leave it here for him to guzzle when he comes around ag'in."

"So they picked up the bottles that lay about, with the exception of two that were broken and three that had been emptied, and moved away, leaving Frank still unconscious by the roadside.

Bart Hodge found it difficult to keep from chuckling aloud, so great was his satisfaction. In his mind he pictured Frank being turned from Snodd's, refused admission to the academy, and going back home in disgrace.

"He won't bother me any more," thought the youthful schemer. "I have done for him."

Mrs. Snodd was anxiously awaiting the return of her husband, and Belinda had refused to retire till her father

came in. They both flew at him the moment he appeared.

"Did you find a burglar?" they fluttered.

"Yas," nodded Mr. Snodd. "We found one of 'em, but I guess he hadn't stole northin' more than cider."

"Did you catch him? Did he show fight?"

"He wasn't in any condition to show fight, for he'd been monkeyin' with that cider, an' that stuff's got lots of kick to it. He's down here 'side of the road a piece, full as a tick. I don't b'lieve you can guess who it is."

"Crazy Day?"

"Crazy northin'! It's that new feller that came here last—Merriwell."

Belinda gave a little scream of astonishment, and Mrs. Snodd showed surprise.

"Who'd ever thought it of him?" she cried. "Why, he appeared like a perfect young gentleman."

"He certainly did," agreed Belinda; "and I can't hardly believe it of him now."

"Wal," said Snodd, "I saw him with my own eyes, an' here's my cider that was layin' all around on the ground beside him. That's proof enough for me. We left him right there to sleep off his booze, and he can stay out to-night. When he shows up in the mornin', I shall invite him to pack his bandbox and git. Then I'll report him at the 'cademy."

So Snodd locked up the house with Frank Merriwell outside.

It was some time later that Frank slowly recovered consciousness. His first sensation was one of nausea, while there were dull pains in his head. He tried to move, but it was some time before he could summon

energy to do so, and when he did stir, it brought a groan from his lips.

"I wonder what has happened?" he speculated. "My stomach feels as if I had been chewing tobacco. My head aches as if it had been hit with a brick. Hit? Wasn't it hit? It seems as if I remember something of the sort."

After some time it all came back to him—the sudden attack of the unknown enemy, the blow, the struggle, and the strange odor that robbed him of his senses.

"I wonder if that is all it robbed me of?" he muttered, as he struggled to a sitting position and felt in his pockets. "Here is my purse, my watch, my ring is on my finger, and all my property seems here. That was a queer way for a robber to use a chap."

Not knowing how long he had lain there, he got upon his feet as soon as he was strong enough, and made for Snodd's, staggering and weak. He felt his clothing wet, and the smell of cider came to his nostrils, but it was so mingled with that other smell that had overcome him that he could not tell what it was.

Snodd's was dark and still; no lights were to be seen. Frank tried the door, and found it locked. He did not feel like making a racket and waking Snodd up, so he wandered about the house, looking for some means of reaching his room. Ned Gray's curtains were drawn close, but he fancied he saw a gleam of light, so he picked up some small pebbles and tossed them against the window glass.

In a few seconds the curtain was run up, the window opened, and Gray's voice called down, cautiously:

"Who's there?"

"It's Merriwell," replied Frank. "Won't you please come down and let me in? I'm locked out."

"Down in a minute," was the assurance, as Gray's head disappeared.

Frank went around to the door and waited. He was feeling decidedly ill, and he longed to be in bed.

Pretty soon Gray opened the door cautiously, asking: "Where on earth have you been till this hour, Merriwell?"

"What time is it?"

"Not far from midnight. Where've you been?"

"Oh, over to the academy."

"That bluff don't go, for the regulations there don't allow anything of the sort. But it's all right; I'll never chirp. Won't you come into my room. We're having a little game and drinking up some of Snodd's cider. It's great stuff. Come in."

But Frank begged to be excused, and he lost no time in getting into his own room, undressing, and rolling into bed. It was some time before he got to sleep, but when he did so he slept soundly till morning.

Little did he dream of the surprise that awaited him. He arose and dressed with care, changing the soiled suit he had worn the day before for a light suit from his trunk. His head was a trifle sore where his mysterious foe had struck him, but beyond that he did not seem to feel much the worse for his night's adventure.

When the breakfast bell rang, he went down.

Snodd met him in the hall, and said:

"I've hitched up a team, an' there's a boy waitin' at the door to take you an' your trunk away from here. You can git breakfast at the village."

"What does this mean?" asked Frank, in utter amazement.

"It means that I know you for a thief and a drunkard, an' I don't propose to keep you under this roof another minute!" hotly declared John Snodd.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE GAME FAILED.

"Thief! Drunkard! , Mr. Snodd, are you crazy?"

"No, sir."

"Then what can you mean?"

"Just what I say, by gum!"

Frank's face was flushed, and he looked proudly indignant.

"You have no right to call me a thief and a drunkard, sir! I never stole anything in my life, and I do not know the taste of liquor."

"Wal, you know the taste of cider purty dern well, an' it's no use for you to deny that you sacked lots of my bottled cider out of the sullen last night, for you was seen carryin' o' it off, and I saw ye arter tha a-layin 'side the road down by the Cove, drunk as a lord, with the bottles scattered al. around ye Oh, you're caught! Go right back and pack your trunk, an' I'll help ye lug it out to the wagon. It's no use to plaver, fer when John Snodd sees a thing with his own two good eyes, he comes purty blamed near knowin' of it."

Frank was nearly overcome with astonishment and indignation, but he fully realized what it meant to have such a charge proved against him, and that served to calm him somewhat.

"Mr. Snodd," he said, steadily, "there is a mistake here, and I trust you will give me a show to prove my innocence."

"You can't do it. Didn't I say I saw ye? An' I

wasn't the only one. You was seen by another, and there he is."

Bart Hodge had appeared at the head of the stairs, and halted there. His eyes were fixed on Frank, who fancied he saw a gleam of triumph in their depths.

"I'm sorry for you, Merriwell," murmured Bart, with mock solicitude and sympathy. "If I'd known it was you, I wouldn't have said a word; but when I saw four or five dark forms come out of the cellar and scurry away, I was sure they must be burglars, so I told Mr. Snodd, and we followed down the road till we found you."

A light began to dawn on Frank.

"I've been the butt of a rather tough joke," he said, with a rueful smile. "That is plain enough."

"Oh, you can't fool me that way," declared John Snodd, stubbornly. "You was drunk, for we smelled the cider on yer breath."

"What time was this?"

"'Bout half-past nine."

"What time did you see the burglars come out of the cellar, Hodge?"

"It was exactly eight-thirty, for I looked at my watch."

"Well," said Frank, with satisfaction, "I fancy I shall be able to prove an alibi, for I was with Lieutenant Gordan at the academy till nine o'clock, as he will testify. This being true, you will readily see that I could not have been one of those who entered your cellar and stole your cider, Mr. Snodd."

For a single instant Snodd seemed slightly taken aback, but he quickly recovered.

"If you didn't go into the sullen, you know who did. You can't deny it."

"No, I do not know who did."

"But you know something 'bout it; I can see that in your face. Now, don't you know somethin' 'bout it?"

"I—I——"

"That settles it; you might jest as well confess. You let somebody else steal the cider, an' then you got drunk on it. The partaker is jest as bad as ther thief, an', in this case, I think he's wuss, fer he didn't have the courage to help git the stuff he wanted. You let somebody else take all the resk, and then you took your share of the stolen cider. I don't propose ter keep no such boy in my house, so you can pack up an' git."

By this time all the boys in the house were listening, having been attracted by Snodd's high words. They were gathered at the dining-room door and at the head of the stairs.

Mrs. Snodd and Belinda were also listening, while at the open front door the face of Tad Jones appeared. The urchin was loyal, and he cried:

"If this is the feller you want me to drive over to the village, Mr. Snodd, I'm goin' to tell you I don't take no stock in his being drunk on cider. He's a boss feller, and I'll stick by him!"

"Thank you, Tad," smiled Frank. "I won't forget you when that little picnic comes off—the one I promised you we should have."

Tad grinned.

"I kinder guess you feel like having it more than ever now," he said.

"Mr. Snodd," spoke Frank, soberly, "at least you will give me a chance to tell my side of the story."

"It won't do no good."

"Perhaps not, but I will tell it. As I said, I was with Lieutenant Gordan till nine o'clock, as I can prove by the lieutenant. I left the academy to come home, and was a little more than half way here when somebody suddenly jumped out of some bushes at the side of the road, and struck me a terrible blow on the head. The bump is in evidence now, and it's pretty near as large as a hen's egg. I wasn't quite knocked out, but the fellow grappled with me, and held something over my nose—a cloth that was saturated with chloroform, or something of that sort. He threw me to the ground, and that was the last I knew till I awoke hours later and found myself there, with a pain in my head and a sick feeling in my stomach. My first thought was that I had been robbed, but I found my money and valuables untouched, and I have not been able to understand the meaning of it all till the present time."

"That's a purty slick yarn, but it's fishy."

"You do not believe me?"

"Hardly."

"I have told you the truth; I don't know what more I can do."

"You can pack up an' git."

"You are still determined to turn me out?"

"I be."

Once more Frank glanced at Bartley Hodge, and again he saw the triumphant gleam in the dark eyes of his enemy.

"You seem to be pleased about it, Hodge."

"On the contrary," asserted the hypocritical young

rascal, "I am sorry that I had anything to do with it; but you can't expect anybody with sense to believe your story."

"Can't I?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, I believe it, pop," Belinda declared, coming to the front. "I know he told the truth, for there wasn't any lie in his face."

"Thank you, Miss Snodd," said Frank, bowing gallantly. "I'll not forget your confidence in me."

The girl blushed furiously, and retired in sudden confusion.

"Proof is proof," shouted Snodd. "Pack your trunk, young feller!"

"All right," said Frank, quietly. "It is useless to say anything more about it. I will pack up and go."

"Hold on!" cried Barney Mulloy, forcing his way forward. "It's nivver a bit ye'll do thot soame, Merriwell, me b'y. Av yez pack an' move, it's th' whole gang av us will move wid yez. Eh, b'ys?"

"You bet!" shouted the boys, with the exception of Hodge.

"It's moighty little we think av a snake," continued Barney, giving Bart a meaning look. "And it's mesilf can break th' face av th' spalpane thot plays th' spoy."

"And as for stealing the cider," put in Ned Gray, "we are all of us ready to swear that Merriwell had no hand in that, though he and Hodge were the only ones in the house who did not take a hand. The rest of us, one and all, were in it, so you will have to fire the gang if you fire one, Mr. Snodd. And if you report one of us at the academy, you will have to report us all."

Snodd was taken aback. He did not fancy the idea of losing all his boarders.

"But—how'd Merriwell happen to have any of the cider?" he asked.

"That was a little joke of ours," explained Sam Winslow, readily, to the surprise of the others and the utter amazement of Bart Hodge. "He wouldn't drink any of the cider—said it was against his principles—so we ambushed him and etherized him. Then we left the cider all around by way of a joke. Hey, boys?"

"That's what we did," agreed the others, in chorus, Hodge alone remaining silent.

"Wal," said Snodd, slowly, "all I've got ter say is that it was a gol durned poor joke, an' you fellers will have to pay for the cider. I guess you needn't pack up, Merriwell."

"Whoop!" cried Tad Jones. "What's the matter with Merriwell?"

"He's all right!" shouted the boys.

"Three cheers for him!" squealed Tad.

"Hip, hip, hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" roared the boys.

"And a groan for Hodge!" cried Tad.

A most dismal groan sounded through the rooms.

Bart's face grew pale, and his eyes blazed with disappointment and rage.

"That's all right, fellows," he said, huskily, his voice far from steady. "If you'd taken me into your confidence, all this racket would have been saved. I didn't know it was Merriwell till we found him in the road."

He turned and hurried away to his room.

"Come to breakfast, boys!" called Mrs. Snodd.

The boys gathered about Frank, singing, as they escorted him to the dining-room:

“For he’s a jolly good fellow,
He’s a jolly good fellow,
Which nobody can deny.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT.

"I'm stuck on the way you fellers pulled me through that scrape," said Frank, as the boys gathered in Ned Gray's room after breakfast. "But I'm blessed if I see just why you knocked me over and left me with cider bottles scattered all about me last night."

"We didn't," said Ned.

"Didn't?"

"No."

"But you said you did."

"And got you out of a bad scrape by saying so; all the same, we didn't know a thing about it till we heard it from Snodd."

Frank whistled.

"I fancied this mystery solved," he said, "and now it is deeper than ever. If you fellows didn't do the trick, who did?"

"You tell."

"I can't."

"There's a gint Oi'd kape me oies on, av Oi wur in yer place, Merriwell," said Barney Mulloy. "That gint's name is Bart Hodge. Av he an't a snake, Oi dunno."

"Oh, I have an old score to settle with him," said Frank. "Gray, will you bear a challenge for me?"

"Sure!" cried Ned, delighted.

"All right. Give me paper and ink."

"A duel!" cried the boys, delightedly. "He'll have to

fight you, Merriwell, or he'll never stand much show in the academy."

"Oh, I fancy he will fight all right," smiled Frank. "It strikes me he will be quite ready, if he is sure he will have a fair show."

"That's what he shall have."

Frank quickly wrote the challenge, which he inclosed in an envelope, and intrusted to Ned Gray, who assured him that it should be delivered at the first opportunity.

A short time later, Frank made his way with the others toward the academy, where his studies were to begin, and where for the next ten days he was to do his best to fit himself for examination.

From a distance they saw a corps of cadets march straight as a ruler across the grounds and disappear in the big building, and Frank wondered if all of his present companions would be successful in passing muster and getting into the school.

Although Lieutenant Gordan had seemed to believe there would be no doubt about Frank passing Merriwell himself resolved not to fail from any fault of his own, and he began to study in earnest, reviewing old ground and fitting himself for the examination to come.

Hodge was so confident that he refused to waste his valuable time in brushing up on things he had already studied till he was quite sick of them all, and he rather openly expressed his contempt of so much red tape.

"This is different from what it is at West Point," he said to one of the applicants, who did not happen to be boarding at Snodd's. "They are not going to refuse any of us here, unless they have to, you may gamble on that."

"But we'll have to study after being admitted, and we may as well get at it now."

"Rot!" returned Bart, contemptuously. "If anybody thinks I am going to kill myself with study here, he's a fool."

As he happened to be unpopular with the boys at Snodd's, Hodge took care to work himself into the good graces of the fellows who were stopping at the village until they were admitted. As he was well provided with cash, and inclined to spend it freely, this won him temporary friendships later on.

Hodge showed no surprise when Ned Gray soberly presented him with Frank's challenge that noon. He read it with a sneer on his face, and then tore it up, saying:

"I will find a friend who'll see you, Gray, and make arrangements."

"Very well, sir," bowed Ned, stiffly.

That afternoon Hodge's friend showed up. He was a big, bullying fellow from Michigan, and his name was Hugh Basbridge. It was said that he had tried to get into West Point, had been sent there, but failed to pass at the examination.

It did not take the boys long to make terms. It was decided that the fight should take place that very night in Chadwick's pasture, which was not far from Snodd's. The weapons were to be bare fists, and the battle was to be to a finish.

When Gray reported to Frank, the latter felt something like a pang of shame, for he was not a bully or fighting character, but then he thought of the debt he owed Hodge, and hardened his heart to his finer feelings.

Bart took supper at the village that night, and did his best to make himself "solid" with the boys who were stopping there temporarily. In this he succeeded very

well, as was shown by his backing when the boys assembled to witness the fight that night.

It was ten-thirty when all arrangements had been made, and the two lads faced each other in the hollow of Chadwick's pasture.

Both had stripped off their coats and vests, bound their suspenders about their waists, and rolled up their sleeves.

Although there was but the ghost of a moon, it was a fairly light night, and one boy could be distinguished from another at a distance of several yards.

In some way a number of cadets had scented the fight and found a way to slip out of the academy grounds and reach the spot.

Bits of fire here and there told that the boys were smoking cigarettes freely.

They talked guardedly, for the night was still, and sounds would travel a long distance.

Tad Jones was on hand, quivering with excitement.

"Give it to the duffer!" he had whispered to Frank. "Remember how he kicked my dog and then cut it with the whip."

Tad did not mention the blow he had received himself.

Frank suspected that Bart had somehow been at the bottom of the trick played on him the night before, and he was confident that his enemy had done his best to spoil his chance of getting into the academy.

This was quite enough to make any spirited young fellow long to punch the offender's head.

Ned Gray had whispered to Frank just before the two boys stood up to face each other:

"This is different from a sudden fight, Merriwell. In ordinary cases, I believe in getting in the first blow, and

that is all well enough now, if you can do it without exposing yourself to a bad counter. But if you have any skill at boxing, take my advice and feel of him a while."

As Frank said nothing to this, Ned went on :

"In that way you may be able to find his weak points, and then you must sail in and do him. Don't let him wind you."

"Time!" called the referee, softly but sharply.

Then the two foes stood face to face in their white shirts.

"Shake hands!" was the stern order.

Both seemed to hesitate, and then Frank put out his hand, which Bart barely touched.

Then came the word that put them both on the defensive, and the fight had begun.

Hodge launched himself at Frank, who fell back from the rush, dodging and avoiding his enemy.

It was instantly seen that both lads knew something of the art of boxing, and the spectators were breathless with interest.

In the dim light all their movements could not be followed as well as they might under other circumstances; but both were seen to feint and cut and lunge and parry and dodge.

Then, of a sudden, they came to close quarters.

Smack—smash—smack!

Three blows were struck in swift succession, and Hodge got in two of them, both of which were light, nowever, when compared with the smash he received on the cheek.

Hodge staggered and then lunged at Frank, who avoided him by a nimble leap.

From this moment the fight was fast and fierce, but

Frank kept his head in a wonderful manner, while Hodge grew furious with rage.

"I'll fix you yet!" he grated, as Frank avoided one of his swinging blows.

"You did your best to fix me last night," returned Merriwell.

"You and I can't both attend Fardale Academy!"

"It looks that way."

At each other they went, but Hodge was beginning to breathe heavily, while Merriwell still held himself in check, waiting the proper time to force the battle.

Tad Jones could scarcely keep from whooping with excitement. He did not understand why Frank held off, and he longed to shout to his friend to sail in and win.

At length, Frank decided to take the offensive, and straightway he began to tap Hodge in a merciless manner. He soon had Bart's nose bleeding.

Twice Bart clinched, but Frank threw him heavily and broke away.

In a short space of time Bart received such punishment as he had never endured before, but he was gritty, and he would not give up. He took his "medicine" like a man.

The boys could not help admiring his grit. Even Frank confessed to himself that Hodge had sand to spare.

Bart grew weaker and weaker, till at length Frank was able to send him staggering at every other blow. He was knocked down repeatedly, yet he came up and resumed the fight before he could be counted out.

"Will he never cry enough?" thought Frank, whose conscience smote him every time he struck his sorely punished enemy.

Suddenly there was a great flurry of excitement, and a cadet broke into the circle, crying softly:

"Scatter, boys—scatter! Old Gunn's got wind of this some way, and he's right here with Colonel Hicks! Dust!"

There was a wonderful scattering, and Frank found himself left alone, feeling rather dazed and bewildered.

He did not wish to leave any of his clothing to be captured as evidence against him, for he knew discovery meant that he would be refused admission to the academy, so he groped around on the ground for his coat.

Suddenly he felt himself grasped by strong hands.

CHAPTER VII.

A PEACE OFFERING SCORNEO.

A voice hissed in his ear!

"Phwat are yez doin', Merriwell, me b'y? Shkip av ye don't want to be caught!"

It was Barney Mulloy.

"My coat and vest!" gasped Frank. "I can't leave them to be found. I must——"

"Run, ye gossoon! The b'ys hev all ye shtuff. Av ye're caught, it's nivver a bit will ye git into th' shkool. Here they coom!"

Several dark forms were hurrying toward them through the darkness.

Barney literally dragged Frank away, and as the two lads started to run, a stern voice called:

"Halt!"

"Loike an ixpress train we will—Oi don't think," muttered the Irish lad. "Av ye catch us, ye'll nade wings on yer fate."

Frank was a good runner, and, having recovered from his dazed condition, he kept at Barney's side with ease.

If they were pursued at all, their pursuers soon gave it up, seeing the hopelessness of trying to overtake them, and they got safely away.

As they were clambering over the fence at the farther extremity of the pasture, a figure uprose before them, and a voice called:

"Is that you, Merriwell?"

"Sure," returned Frank.

"I just found out you weren't with us, and turned back to see what had become of you," said Ned Gray. "I was afraid you had fallen into the hands of Old Gunn."

"I don't know but I should if it hadn't been for Barney," said Frank. "He stood by me, and got me away."

"Ye can count on me, Merriwell, me b'y," assured the Irish lad. "Oi'll shtick to yez loike a porus phlaster, so Oi will."

"Come on," urged Gray. "Let's get into Snodd's without delay, for we don't know what Old Gunn may be up to."

Ned had Frank's clothes, and the hero of the late encounter put them on as he ran with his two companions who struck a dog trot, and held steadily to it.

"Hodge has some sand," observed Gray.

"He has lots of it," agreed Frank, rather enthusiastically. "I took a strong dislike to the fellow to begin with, but he has risen in my esteem fifty per cent."

"He wouldn't croak."

"Not till he was clean knocked out, and every time I struck him I felt like a cur, for he had worn himself out, and he was easy."

"Begobs, it's mesilf as thinks he wouldn't have felt vehry bad av it had been th' other way," said Barney.

"That's right," Gray affirmed. "If the tables had been turned, Merriwell, he'd have used you worse than you used him."

"Perhaps so."

"Oh, there's no doubt about it. He's ugly, I can see that, and he is proud. It was his pride more than anything else that brought him up to the scratch when he

was barely able to stagger to his feet in time to keep from being counted out."

"He may be all roight, Merriwell, me b'y," put in Barney; "but, av Oi wuz yez, Oi wouldn't give him a good chance to hit me a swoipe in th' back av th' neck whin Oi wasn't lookin' thot way."

"I think I have pretty nearly squared my account with him," said Frank, who was not inclined to hold a grudge.

"Mebbe he'll think there is a balance on th' other soide now."

"Well, that is for him to say."

All was quiet in the vicinity of Snodd's as they approached the house, and they wondered if all the boys were in.

The door had been left unlocked, and they found it still remained so, enabling them to slip into the house softly, without any trouble or disturbance.

"Who's that?" whispered some one, in the darkness of the hall.

"Merriwell, Mulloy and Gray," replied Ned, promptly.

"Good stuff!" softly exclaimed the unknown. "All the fellows are in now. I will lock the door. Hodge is in your room, Gray, with some of the fellows, who are fixing him up. Merriwell did give him a terrible hammering."

The carpeted stairs gave out no sound as they ascended, and they were soon at the door of Ned's room, where a soft, peculiar knock caused a key to turn in the lock.

"Come in, Merriwell," invited Gray.

Frank hesitated. His first fancy was that Hodge would think he had come there to gloat over his triumph, if it could be called a triumph; but he quickly decided

he would show by his manner that he was ready to bury the hatchet and call the matter squared.

So the three lads, and the one who had received them in the hall, all slipped quietly into Gray's room, which was already well filled with fellows who were smoking cigarettes and discussing the fight, while they watched one of their number apply handkerchiefs dripping with cold water to Bart Hodge's cut, bruised and discolored face.

Frank had not realized how embarrassing the situation would be until he was well into the room, and it was then too late to retreat. There was a moment of silence, while the boys stared and hesitated.

It was in this emergency that Sam Winslow showed his tact.

"Hello, Merriwell!" he greeted, heartily. "We didn't know what had become of you. Glad you came in, for now we can congratulate both you and Hodge. It was a pretty little scrap, and as clean a display of sand as I have seen in a long time. You both came off with honors."

"That's right," agreed the others. "You are both to be congratulated."

"Thank you, fellows," said Frank, after another moment of hesitation.

But Bart Hodge said nothing, and, after one glance at his late antagonist, turned away.

The situation was still awkward, and then, with the generous impulse that ever comes to an honorable and victorious enemy, he advanced toward Hodge, saying:

"I am glad the fight is over, and I am glad it came

out a draw. I am willing to let bygones be bygones and bury the hatchet. Will you shake hands, Hodge?"

He held out his hand.

Hodge tore the wet handkerchiefs from his face and flung them into the washbowl, straightening up stiffly, as he fiercely retorted:

"The fight did not come out a draw! Look at my face! You have scarcely a mark! You were the best man to-night, Merriwell, but this matter does not end here!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will not shake hands with you, and I will meet you again when I'll be able to do you worse than you did me to-night. I am not the kind of a fellow that forgets or forgives."

"All right," said Frank, quietly. "Have it so, if you will. I am sorry, but I can't help it."

"If you had a little more decency, you would not have come here now," came bitterly from the lips of the dark-faced boy. "You knew you had the best of the fight, and you knew I was in this room; but you——"

"I came to see if there was not a show to call the matter quits."

"And have it flung in my face that you licked me in an open fight! But you didn't lick me!"

"I did not say so."

"And you never will lick me," Hodge hotly declared. "If we ever come together again, I'll be ready for you. I know your tricks now. But you want to remember that I told you once that both of us could not attend Fardale Academy."

"I remember it."

"Well, I am going to tell you so again. That's all I have to say, and you are welcome to think what you please about it."

Then Hodge returned to the wet handkerchiefs, and his manner showed that he had said all he meant to say.

CHAPTER VIII.

"KIMBO."

It was generally conceded among the boys that Merriwell had done the manly thing, and Hodge had shown himself a sulker and a cad by his refusal to shake hands.

By his apparent courage, Bart had won a place in the esteem of the fellows at Snodd's, and he might have been popular had he met Frank in the spirit that Merriwell showed; but it was his thought that Frank would be regarded as the victor, and would be the most popular, which was something that would make friendship between them impossible.

In his heat Bart had said something that he afterward regretted. He had openly declared that both Merriwell and himself could not attend Fardale Academy, and he afterward realized that should anything happen to his rival, he had placed himself in a position that must bring suspicion upon him.

When he thought of this he was intensely angry with himself, and he slept very little that night, twisting and turning, moaning through dreams of deadly conflicts with his enemy, awaking with set teeth and foam-flecked lips, and longing for morning to come. Indeed, he suffered all that a proud and haughty spirit which has been humiliated can suffer and is certain to suffer.

And it was not till the gray light of another day showed faintly in the east that he slept without dreaming, utterly worn out by the wretchedness of the night.

For Frank the night had not been entirely without

dreams, but they were far pleasanter than those that visited his enemy. He dreamed of home and his boyish sweetheart, and then came visions of success at Fardale Academy, and of happy days to follow.

Again it happened that Hodge did not appear at the breakfast table with the others, nor did he show up at the Fardale Academy that day, sending an excuse that he was ill in bed. As he was not already a scholar, and it was for his own interest that he should be there to work for admission, no comments were made on this excuse and no one was questioned.

It seemed that all the cadets who attended the fight in Chadwick's pasture had been able to get back to their rooms without being detected, which was a very fortunate thing for them.

Frank was intercepted by a corporal who said his name was Miles, and who politely invited him to the barracks, at the same time saying some very complimentary things. Frank hesitated, something telling him he had better keep away; but Miles was so polite, pleasant, and persuasive that it was not easy to refuse, so he went along.

On their way to the, to Frank, mysterious portion of the academy, Frank observed that Miles seemed troubled with an odd cough, and that, for some reason, the three or four cadets on guard seemed strangely attracted by something that caused them to stand rigidly with averted faces while Miles and his companion passed.

The smile on Miles' face broadened as they reached the door of a room at the extremity of the corridor. He pushed the door open without ceremony, motioning for Frank to enter.

In another moment Frank found himself in the pres-

ence of more than a dozen cadets, the door closed behind him, and Corporal Miles was gone.

“What’s this—what’s the meaning of this intrusion, sir?” cried a strapping fellow who looked fierce enough to eat Frank.

“Er—er—I beg to be excused,” stammered Frank. “I was invited here.”

“Invited here? By whom, sir?”

“By Corporal Miles.”

“Corporal Miles! There is no such person in this academy. This intrusion by a civilian is unprecedented. How did you pass the guard?”

“They turned their backs on me, and——”

“What’s that?” roared the strapping fellow, apparently greatly incensed. “Do you accuse the cadets of Fardale Academy with neglect of duty? Do you dare make such a charge? It cannot be you know the grave import of your words!”

“I don’t accuse anybody of anything,” laughed Frank, shortly. “I think I have made a mistake, and I will get out.”

But it was not so easy to get out as it was to get in, as he quickly discovered, for the door of the room had been made secure. Then he realized that he had been trapped to provide some amusement for the cadets.

“Not so fast, sir,” said the big fellow. “For all we know, you may be a spy here, with intentions hostile to the peace and prosperity of this institution; or there may be a still graver charge than that hanging over you. What is your name?”

Realizing that he might as well make the best of it, the unfortunate “civilian” replied:

“Frank Merriwell.”

"Merriwell, Merriwell? Seems to me I have heard that name before. Weren't you concerned in some kind of a rowdyish affair—a fight, or something of that sort—last night?"

"I—I believe so."

"Exactly, sir. Now, will you be good enough to name your opponent in that disgraceful affair, and likewise any and all persons present?"

It was a command, and Frank immediately took alarm. Perhaps, after all, this trick was an attempt to force him into giving away the names of the offenders, which might mean something serious for the offenders themselves, so he promptly returned:

"No, sir. I will not."

"What!" roared the big cadet, as if he doubted the evidence of his ears. "Do you know the penalty of thus defying me, Major-General Hardtack, and these other members of the grand general court-martial? It means that you will be immediately condemned to suffer 'kimbo.'"

"And what is 'kimbo?'"

"It is a Greek noun, the name of the most terrible and soul-racking punishment known to military life."

"Then I suppose I shall have to suffer 'kimbo.'"

"You absolutely refuse to name any of the parties concerned in this disgraceful and brutal affair?"

"You have guessed right."

"And that in the face of the most terrible punishment known to military life?"

"Right again."

"You are mad!"

"Not yet; but I expect to be when I get kimbo," smiled Frank. "I'm a trifle unpleasant when I get mad."

Immediately “Major-General Hardtack,” as the strapping fellow had called himself, made a signal to his companions, and a double circle was formed entirely around Frank. Not one of the cadets smiled, but all looked as if they were participating in the most serious affair possible.

“Gentlemen of the grand general court-martial,” said the big fellow, “you have heard the words of this intruder, and I leave it to you to state how he shall be punished.”

As one person, they all said:

“‘Kimbo!’”

“Then his doom is sealed. Bring forth the implements of torture.”

Immediately a plug of very black chewing tobacco and a cigarette were handed to “Major-General Hardtack,” who received them, and turning to Frank, said:

“You will first be expected to take a chew of tobacco, smoke this cigarette, and sing a comic song, all at the same time. That is the first stage of ‘kimbo.’”

“But I never smoked a dozen cigarettes in my life, and it makes me sick to chew tobacco,” protested Frank.

“I warned you that ‘kimbo’ is the most terrible punishment known to military life, and this is but the first degree. The horrors that are to follow will make you regret that you ever aspired to become a cadet at Fardale Academy. Open your mouth, sir, and proceed to gnaw off a generous chew of this tobacco. In the meantime the cigarette will be lighted for you, and I advise you to be thinking of a song.”

Frank’s eyes flashed. He looked around and measured the strength of the enemy, and it began to look as if he must fight.

At this moment, however, the door was suddenly flung open from the outside, and the excited face of "Corporal Miles" appeared.

"Skip, fellows—lively!" he hissed. "There's pink haze on the luna!"

Out of the room dusted those cadets in an astonishing brief space of time, leaving Frank alone and rather dazed. Then he heard the quick tramp of feet, and the face of Lieutenant Gordan appeared at the door.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INTERRUPTED PICNIC.

"Merriwell!"

The lieutenant was surprised, and his face showed his displeasure.

"How does this happen?" he immediately demanded. "How is it I find you here?"

"Because I was fool enough to accept an invitation to come here," replied the boy, frankly.

"Who gave you the invitation?"

"I do not know his name."

"A cadet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe him."

Frank hesitated.

"I—I hardly think I can," he stammered. "In fact, sir, I did not observe him very closely."

"Whom did you meet here?"

"A number of cadets."

"You would be able to identify some of them if you saw them again?"

"I might be able to, but I would not."

A queer twinkle showed for a moment in Lieutenant Gordan's eyes, but his face remained as grave and stern as ever.

"You must be aware that the cadets have perpetrated a very serious offense in thus bringing a person who is not yet a student at this academy to this room, which happens to be unoccupied at the present time. It is quite

probable that they did not have the friendliest motive toward you, and you would have suffered some indignity if I had not scented something wrong. I was just a moment too late to catch any of them, but, if you choose, you may be able to aid me in identifying the offenders."

"No, sir; I cannot do it."

"Very well," said Lieutenant Gordan, and somehow Frank fancied there was a ring of approval in his voice. "Without your aid, I shall, beyond a doubt, be unable to do anything more than see that the sentries are reprimanded. You will do well not to let anything of this sort occur again. I will now see that you get out of the barracks without further molestation."

Frank followed the lieutenant from the room, and they proceeded down the hall past the rigid sentries, who saluted punctiliously, and looked as innocent as lambs. Mr. Gordan, however, made them all uneasy by pausing to note down the name of each one, which told them there was trouble ahead.

The lieutenant escorted Frank from the building and clear of the grounds, giving him some very good advice at parting.

As for Frank, he felt that he was lucky to get off as well as he had, for he realized that he had permitted himself to be led fairly into the jaws of a very nasty trap, for which he blamed himself alone. He caught himself wondering what would have followed the first degree of "kimbo" if he had been forced to take that degree, and he shuddered at the thought of trying to sing a song while chewing tobacco and smoking a cigarette.

"Those fellows are so fierce to haze somebody that they couldn't wait for the plebes to get into the academy," muttered Frank. "But I wonder why they chose me?"

Have they a particular grudge against me? Have they taken a dislike to me as soon as this?"

He did not know it was because they had really taken a liking for him, and wanted to see what kind of stuff he was made of; and he did not know he had done a very proper thing in failing to recognize any one of them well enough to describe him.

Frank decided not to relate to the fellows at Snodd's what had occurred. He felt that the least said about the matter the better.

It was a well-known fact that as soon as a lad became a plebe at Fardale Academy he was destined to suffer hazing, and in this case the students had been unable to repress their intense longing to "get a go" at one of the new boys. Having become prominent through his fight with Hodge, Frank was chosen.

Frank did not know what result came of Lieutenant Gordan's investigations; but he bore no grudge against his late captors, and it was his hope that they might get off without severe punishment.

The following day Frank was notified by Miss Snodd that she had invited several girls from the village school to spend Saturday afternoon with her at the Cove, where they would have a picnic, with Snodd's boarders as representatives of the sterner sex.

Frank promised to be on hand.

Saturday came, and a dozen laughing, merry girls came with it. There were introductions all around, and then they trooped off toward the Cove, the boys carrying the lunch baskets, a tennis and an archery outfit, with other needed things, while the girls flocked on in advance, chattering in a light-hearted way.

Among them all, one dark-haired, red-lipped, jolly girl

had instantly attracted Frank, who saw in her an ideal that had long haunted his youthful fancy. At first it almost seemed that he had known her before, but on hearing her name he realized that this was their first meeting.

For a moment Inza Burrage's dark eyes had looked straight into his brown orbs, and Frank had felt his heart leap into a sort of fluttering tumult that was a new sensation to him, although he had left a little sweetheart at home, one whom he had fancied a great deal.

Inza was a jolly, light-hearted, unaffected girl, and, after that first glance she seemed to pay no more attention to Frank than she did to any of the other boys in the party.

Down by the Cove was a pretty little grove close to a field that was level and grassed like a fine lawn. In the grove was a long picnic table, with plank seats around it, and on the field near by the archer's target was set, and the tennis court lined off.

The girls spread the table for the picnic, decorating it with green things from the woods and the wild flowers of late spring-time to be found in field and dell.

The boys were at their best, and Barney Mulloy bubbled with Irish wit till he was repressed by Sam Winslow, who feared the girls would think them a lot of silly fools if they continued to laugh so much.

Hodge and Merriwell took care to avoid each other, but both were merry, and it happened that both were attracted by the same lodestone—Inza Burrage. And so it came about that, unwittingly, they found themselves thrown much into each other's company.

Hodge was a handsome fellow, having a polished manner, and a most captivating smile, so he soon became a

great favorite with the girls, and Frank was not a little chagrined to see that Inza seemed to enjoy his company.

Becoming aware of Merriwell's preference for the dark-haired girl, Hodge redoubled his efforts to win her favor, and his heart was filled with triumph when he saw that he was succeeding.

"I'll show that fellow that he doesn't cut any ice in a case like this," thought Bart.

While some of the party amused themselves at archery, others played tennis, or sat about and chatted.

The tennis players were chosen by lot, and the first four happened to be Merriwell, Hodge, Miss Burrage and Miss Snodd. And then, to cap Frank's dismay, Hodge secured Miss Burrage as a partner.

Frank was too gentlemanly to show his chagrin, and Hodge was far too shrewd to let more than a gleam of triumph appear in his eyes.

Inza was as lithe and light of foot as a fawn, while Belinda was rather buxom and heavy, and it seemed to Frank that Hodge was thoroughly triumphant for the occasion.

The first set began with Inza serving, and Belinda made a successful return, which was promptly volleyed by Bart, who succeeded in placing a smashing drive where Frank could not handle it, and his soft laugh of triumph brought a bit of blood to Merriwell's cheeks.

Now it happened that Frank was really an expert at tennis, and this first "break" came through his own discomfiture at the situation, as much as by Hodge's skillful return. He was instantly put on his mettle, and, as the game progressed, he showed that he was thoroughly capable of taking care of his division of the court.

But Hodge was also a most skillful player, and the two sides were not fairly matched, as Inza was much more light and deft than Belinda, so Frank and his companion were getting the worst of it.

Frank could feel his cheeks burning as he heard the watching girls speaking most complimentary of Bart's beautiful playing, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he kept from losing his nerve and invading his partner's territory on occasions when he felt that he might successfully return a stroke that she was almost sure to miss.

Midway in the game came a startling interruption.

Tad Jones appeared running toward the party waving his hands wildly, while he screamed something that they did not catch at first, although a big, four-legged creature came into view not far behind the boy, apparently in hot pursuit.

"Listen!" cried Frank. "What is he saying?"

They listened, and heard him shriek huskily:

"Run! run! run! Mad dog! Mad dog!"

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE BATTLE.

"Mad dog!"

Some of the boys took up the cry, and the girls screamed.

It was a moment of great excitement and confusion.

Tad Jones was running for his life, and behind him reeled a red-eyed, foam-dripping creature that was terrible to see.

It was in truth a mad dog, and a monster at that.

"Run, girls—run!" shouted the boys.

Some of them did run, and some seemed paralyzed with terror, quite unable to get away.

Inza Burrage started to flee into the woods, but tripped and fell heavily to the ground.

"Oh, I have sprained my ankle!" she cried, her face pale with pain and fear.

Bart Hodge flung aside his racket and started precipitately for the shelter of the woods.

"Help me, Mr. Hodge!" called Inza, getting upon her feet, but falling again the moment she tried to bear her weight upon the injured ankle.

Bart did not seem to hear the cry, for he kept on, unmindful that several girls were cowering together, seemingly dazed and helpless.

Belinda Snodd ran like a deer, and quickly vanished in the grove.

Seeing this, Frank sprang to the side of Inza Burrage. Without a word he caught her up in his arms and ran

with her to the other girls, where he gently placed her on the ground.

Then he was seen to reach into his pocket and produce a stout clasp-knife, the blade of which he quickly opened.

A desperate light was shining in his eyes as he faced toward the oncoming boy and dog.

"What are you going to do?" panted Inza. "You are not going to fight the dog?"

"Yes!"

"He will kill you!" she screamed. "Remember that one scratch from his teeth means sure death!"

"I know that!"

"Then run—run!"

"And leave you and these girls to be bitten by that beast! Not much! Better that he should bite one than a dozen."

If ever a boy looked like a born hero, Frank Merriwell did at that moment.

Inza Burrage felt herself thrill with admiration, for all of the terrible peril.

"Run!" shrieked Tad Jones, once more. "Mad dog! mad dog!"

Frank caught up several coats which the boys had discarded, wrapping them swiftly around his left forearm to the elbow, covering his hand and wrist with many thicknesses.

Tad Jones plunged past, and the terrible dog was close upon them.

It was a moment of such peril as Frank Merriwell had never known before, and it was not strange that his face was pale as marble; but he did not tremble, and his nerves were steady as though made of steel.

His eyes were fixed on the snarling, frothing, fiery-eyed dog, and he placed himself fairly in the creature's path.

At that moment he murmured something. Perhaps it was a prayer for strength.

The dog's long teeth gleamed through the white foam that flew from its lips and covered its breast. It saw Frank, and, with a snapping howl, leaped through the air straight for the boy's throat.

Frank put up his muffled left arm, and the creature's powerful jaws closed upon it, seeming to crush the bone.

It was with no little difficulty that Frank kept from going down before the shock of the beast's assault, although he had braced himself to withstand the force of the spring.

However, he kept on his feet, and, with all his strength, he drove the blade of the knife into the dog's left side, hoping to reach the creature's heart.

The force of the stab caused the dog to release its hold, but then it seemed to have made the beast fiercer than before.

Again it hurled itself at the boy's throat, and again its jaws closed on that muffled arm.

The girls were screaming now, horrified beyond measure at the spectacle of the mad battle going on before their eyes.

Inza Burrage alone seemed silent. She was not conscious of any pain in her injured ankle, but her hands were clasped and her eyes were fastened on Frank Merriwell.

"What a brave, noble fellow he is!" her white lips whispered. "How terrible that he should give his life for us! How grand!"

Frank's jaws were set, and his face was working with emotions that controlled him, but over all could be seen the determination to keep the mad dog from the defenseless girls—to kill the creature.

Once—twice the dog sent him staggering; once he dropped to his knees, and it seemed that he would fall prostrate and be torn by those deadly teeth.

The muffling coats about the boy's arm were rent and hanging in rags, and his arm felt as if the dog's teeth had already torn the flesh to the bone.

How much longer could he hold out? Was he to fail after all? Would the dog leave him mangled and torn to mangle and tear the helpless girls?

Where were the other fellows? Why didn't they come out with clubs and stones and beat the dog to death?

He was beginning to stagger, and a mist drifted before his eyes, while a feeling of unutterable despair came over him.

The end was near!

Again the dog leaped at his throat, and he scarcely had energy enough to protect himself with his muffled arm.

Once more he struck with the knife, and then he felt it slip from his fingers.

He was helpless!

This seemed to arouse him a bit, and, with all his strength, he fastened his hand upon the dog's throat, clinging there, for all of the beast's efforts to close upon his unmuffled arm.

Everything was swimming about him, and he felt that he was on the verge of falling unconscious. His white lips parted, and he faintly gasped.

"Run, girls! I can't—I can't——"

Then something seemed to explode in his brain with a crash, and he dropped senseless to the ground, still clinging to the throat of the dog.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A VAULT.

The great crash which Frank heard was the report of a gun, and the muzzle of the weapon had touched the dog's side when it was discharged.

Boy and dog dropped to the ground, and neither made an effort to rise.

"By thunder!" gasped John Snodd, as he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his coat sleeve. "By thunder! I ruther think I've fixed that critter!"

He held the smoking gun in his hand; he had come up during the last few moments of the battle between the boy and dog.

"Tad came to warn us," Mr. Snodd explained, "an' I sent him down here, while I went to git my gun. While I was gittin' my gun, the darned dog skivered past; but I follered as soon as I could, an' I got here jest in time."

"Is he dead?" asked Inza Burrage.

"Guess he is, b'gosh!" nodded Snodd. "I had the end of the gun right up ag'inst him when I fired."

"I mean Mr. Merriwell," explained the girl. "Oh, he fought so nobly to save us! And to think he must die from hydrophobia! It is frightful!"

She covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

Snodd kicked the animal to make sure he was dead, and then he tried to take Frank's fingers from the creature's throat, which proved a most difficult thing to do.

"Reg'lar death grip," commented the man.

Some of the boys came hurrying out of the woods armed with rocks and clubs, and all looking shamefaced.

Bartley Hodge was nearly the last one to appear, and even he did not look pleased when he saw Frank stretched on the ground, white and motionless.

"Has the dog killed Merriwell?" he asked.

"If he hasn't, Merriwell has nothing to thank you for!" came scornfully from Inza Burrage's lips. "You all ran and left him to fight the dog alone."

"I ran to find a club," muttered Bart. "It was folly to stay and let the dog chew one up without any weapon to show fight with."

"You did not think of us—you simply thought of yourself. But for Frank Merriwell, we might all of us have been eaten up. He is a brave, noble fellow, and the rest of you are——"

She stopped short, but Barney Mulloy was ready to finish.

"——as foine a set av firrust-class cowards as Oi ivver set me oies on, an' it's meself thot's wan av th' same! Av any respectable person ivver spakes to me again, Oi'll be so ashamed av thim thot Oi'll cut thim dead, so Oi will."

Snodd was examining Frank, and he now said:

"I don't seem to find no place where the dog has bit this feller. The stuff he had wrapped around his arm kept the critter from sockin' its teeth in there."

"He has fainted from exhaustion," said Ned Gray. "Let's make a stretcher and carry him to the house."

"In the meantime," directed Sam Winslow, "somebody scud over to the academy for Dr. Brown."

It was found necessary either to make a stretcher for Inza Burrage, or for some of the boys to carry her be-

tween them, and the latter course was decided on. Bart promptly offered his services, but he was utterly discomfited when the injured girl selected Ned Gray and Ross Kent, giving him a look that plainly expressed her utter contempt for him.

In the midst of these precautions, Frank stirred, drew a long, deep sigh, and opened his eyes.

In a moment Inza managed to reach him, crying, sharply:

"Water—somebody bring some water from the spring in the woods."

The water was quickly brought, and, with her handkerchief, she bathed Frank's face, still holding his head in her lap. He looked up at her, their eyes met, and he smiled faintly, and said:

"I didn't let the dog bite you, did I?"

"You saved us all," was her feeling reply. "It was so brave and noble to do such a thing for us!"

"For *you*!" he whispered, and the warm color came back in a flood to her face and neck.

Bart Hodge saw all this. His hands were clenched, and he ground his teeth with rage and jealousy.

"It's Merriwell's luck!" he muttered. "Anybody could do what he did if they had thought of it."

It is the thinking of the right thing to do that nine times out of ten makes the hero.

Hodge set off for the house, intensely disgusted with everybody and everything.

From the window of his room, some time later, he saw the picnickers approaching. Gray and Kent were carrying Inza Burrage, while Frank was walking behind, surrounded by an admiring throng of boys and girls.

"And I don't believe the fellow was so much as

scratched by that dog!" growled Bart, whose intense hatred of Frank had returned with redoubled force.

He was right. Dr. Brown, from the academy, had already examined Frank, and had failed to find the slightest abrasion to indicate that there was danger that the brave boy would suffer from hydrophobia. The escape was certainly most marvelous.

Miss Burrage was taken home in a carriage, and Frank had so far recovered as to drive.

Bart literally gnashed his teeth as he saw them depart, and he renewed his vows of vengeance on Merriwell.

For all of those vows, Hodge seemed to shun Frank during the days that followed closely. He was away at the village much of the time, and he did not mingle with the other boys at Snodd's, for he could not bear to see Merriwell lionized.

Frank began to think that he would have no further trouble with Hodge.

He was to discover his mistake.

It was the day before the examination of the applicants for admission to the academy. Frank was returning to Snodd's in the dusk of early evening, having been in the village for the mail, and, incidentally to get a glimpse of Inza Burrage at the window of her home as he passed.

Between the Cove and the village was the cemetery, and Frank was passing this when he saw a figure skip over the fence and disappear amid the tombstones.

Frank did not believe in ghosts, and his first thought was that somebody must be up to mischief.

"I'll try to follow that fellow," he muttered, and over the fence he went.

He soon saw a dark form hurrying forward amid the tombstones, and, with great caution, he followed.

Not far from the center of the cemetery was a large family vault of stone, and near this the person Frank was following was joined by some one else. Here they stood, and he could hear them talking in low tones, but could not distinguish their words.

"I'll get nearer," was his resolve.

Making a half-circle, he came up behind the vault and crept close upon the unconscious pair.

Reaching a point where he could hear them plainly, he was surprised to recognize the voice of Bartley Hodge.

"I'll pay you well to help me do the job, Bascomb," Bart was saying.

"First pay as you agreed for showing you a place to put him in," said Hodge's companion, and Frank recognized the voice of Hugh Bascomb, one of the village applicants for admission to the academy.

"All right," agreed Bart. "Here's the money."

"Now," spoke Bascomb, after a pause. "You've got the key, and have seen the place. What do you want me to do?"

"Help me, as I said. I tackled him once alone, to say nothing of our fight. I heard the fellows at Snodd's planning to steal cider from the cellar, and I swiped a lot after they had carried off a load. Then I laid for Merriwell on the road, jumped on him when he came along, gave him a crack on the head, and chloroformed him. When I left him he was stretched beside the road with cider spilled over his clothes, and bottles of cider scattered all around. Then I told Snodd I had seen a burglar sneak out of the cellar, and I got the old man to take a gun and lantern and follow me. Of course, I led him to Merriwell, and Snodd thought the fellow was drunk. That would have fixed Merriwell if the blooming idiots

at Snodd's hadn't stood in for him and swore they would all leave if he was fired or reported. Snodd gave in, and Merriwell stayed; but he doesn't know now who it was that put up the job on him, though I suppose he suspects."

"You are mistaken, Hodge," said a cool voice. "I know all about it now."

Bart gave a cry of astonishment and alarm as a dark figure stepped around the vault and confronted him.

"Merriwell!"

"Yes," said Frank. "And I must thank you for explaining things so beautifully. I now know beyond a doubt just how much of a scoundrel you are."

Hodge seemed to recover swiftly.

"How did you come here?" he asked.

"I walked."

"You followed me—you played the spy! Perhaps you'll wish you hadn't!"

Like a cat he leaped forward and clutched Frank, crying to Bascomb:

"Now's our time! I'll make it fifty! Give it to him!"

Frank made one sharp effort to fling Hodge off, and then he dropped to the ground, stunned by a blow delivered by Bascomb.

"Quick!" panted Hodge, as he bent over the fallen youth. "Here's the key! Open the door!"

Bascomb hesitated; but Bart fluttered:

"I'll make it fifty, and our word is as good as his when he gets out, which won't be till it is too late to pass examination. Open the door, I say!"

The huge key grated in the rusty lock, the bolt slid back, and the door was slowly forced open.

Frank realized what was taking place, and he tried to

sit up, but Hodge forced him back, pinning him to the ground with one knee, as he hissed :

"Now give me a hand here, and in he goes!"

The dazed boy was lifted and dragged along the ground over the single step and into the darkness of the chilly vault, where he was unceremoniously dropped to the ground.

Then he heard retreating footsteps, heard the heavy door grate on its unused hinges, heard the bolt shoot into the lock, and knew he was a prisoner.

A prisoner in a cemetery vault!

CHAPTER XII.

ON HAND.

Frank struggled to his feet and staggered to the door, which he vainly tried to open. Then, in sudden frenzy, he beat upon it with his bare hands, shouting for aid.

The sound of his voice seemed to stun him, and he finally became silent, exhausted.

It was some time before he could consider the matter calmly, and then he began to see that Hodge had played a trump card.

"He has taken the trick, and won the game," muttered the unfortunate captive.

But the fellow was a greater villain than Merriwell had thought possible.

"He means to keep me here till after examination to-morrow—probably till the next day. Who will believe my story? It will be thought that I did not have the courage to appear at examination—that I hoped to get into the academy without being examined. Both Hodge and Bascomb will deny having seen me at all, and, in such a case, their word is as good as mine.

"Oh, I am done for."

Something stirred in the darkness, sending the blood rushing icily to his heart.

It was an uncanny place, and he could but think of corpses and ghosts.

Again something stirred, and he pressed himself back against the door, a choking in his throat, listening with intense horror.

Squeak! squeak! squeak!

Rats! A new horror was added to his situation. He knew not how many nor how bold the repulsive little creatures might be. Were they fierce enough to attack him?

Surely the situation was one to appall the stoutest heart.

* * * * *

The day for the examination of applicants for admission to Fardale Academy arrived, and the candidates presented themselves at the academy.

Under the eye of Professor Gunn, a number of cadet officers assigned the applicants to seats and set them at their tasks.

Lieutenant Gordan was present, and, looking the candidates over, he failed to see the face of Frank Merriwell.

"What is the meaning of this?" thought the lieutenant. "Why isn't Merriwell on hand?"

Selecting one of Snodd's boarders, he asked:

"Where is Merriwell? He isn't here."

It happened that Bartley Hodge was the one addressed, and he calmly replied:

"I do not know anything about Merriwell, sir; have not seen him in the last two days."

Barney Mulloy heard this, and looked at the lieutenant as if he had something to say, which led Gordan to ask him if he knew anything of Merriwell.

"Av ye plaze, sor," replied Barney, "he wur not in his room larst noight, an' not wan av us has seen anythin' av him this day."

"And you won't be likely to see anything of him this

day," thought Hodge, exultantly. "Merriwell's goose is cooked."

And then a gasp that was almost a cry of amazement and horror came from his lips.

The door opened, and Frank Merriwell entered the room with a cadet officer.

Merriwell was neatly and tastefully dressed, appearing none the worse for his confinement in the cemetery vault.

Hodge turned pale as death, and shook like a leaf in a strong breeze, while Hugh Bascomb was literally paralyzed with amazement and dismay.

Merriwell had escaped from the vault in time to present himself at the examination—but how?

Both Hodge and Bascomb expected to be denounced without delay, but, instead of that, Frank did not seem to notice them at all, and he went at once about his tasks.

It was a long time before Bart could recover sufficiently to set to work in earnest on the problems, and when he finally did so his mind would stray now and then to speculating on the matter of his foe's escape.

The applicants were given two hours and a half to work out the tasks. Some submitted their answers long before the expiration of that time, and some were still studying over them perplexedly or sitting in blank despair when the time expired.

Hodge and Bascomb left the room some time ahead of Frank, and when he appeared they were waiting for him.

"Well, Merriwell," said Bart, with an attempt at bravado, "I see you got out in time to show up, and I confess that you have beaten me. But what are you going to do about it?"

"I haven't decided yet," was the quiet reply; "but I can break you both at this school if I choose."

"I don't see how. Our word is as good as yours, and you have no proof beyond your own statement——"

"That's where you make a mistake, for I have proof. It happens that you were seen to drag me into the vault and lock me in there. The person who saw you do this was the one who released me, and, if I bring him forward to testify against you, your chance of getting into the academy will be slim."

Hodge and Bascomb exchanged glances. They realized that Merriwell had them at his mercy, and both weakened.

"I say, old man," said Bart, appealingly, "let's drop it—let's call bygones, bygones, as the saying is. If you blow on me and I am stopped from getting into the academy, it will be a dreadful blow to my mother. I confess that I have used you dirty, and I am ashamed of it. I ask you now to forgive me."

"Same here," said Bascomb, although the words plainly cost him a great effort.

Frank was not maliciously revengeful, and so he said:

"You both deserve a square licking, and it would please me to give you what you deserve; but I'll agree not to spoil your chances by blowing—that is, not for the present. We'll see how you handle yourselves in the future."

Hodge and Bascomb both thanked him, and he left them.

"That fellow is dangerous," said Bascomb.

"You are right," nodded Hodge. "He knows too much for our peace of mind. But what are we going to do about it?"

"We may be able to do something in the future," was

the significant reply. "There will be hot times in this academy if all three of us get in."

"You bet!"

* * * * *

The following day the alphabetical list of the admitted applicants was read, and in turn came Bascomb, Hodge, and Merriwell. A few had failed to pass the examination, but Barney Mulloy, Ned Gray, Sam Winslow, and Ross Kent were on the "pass" list.

Tad Jones was on hand to congratulate Frank at the first opportunity, but he declared:

"You was just dead slow to let Hodge and Bascomb in. I knew Bart Hodge was up to something, and I'd been follering him for two days when I heard him and Bascomb agree to meet at the vault. I don't like graveyards much, but I thought I'd be there, and I was, which was a lucky thing for you, else you'd never showed up at examination.

"That's right, Ted," admitted Frank. "I owe you a big debt. But I couldn't quite bring myself to expose those fellows, for it might have been the very thing that would have given them a bad turn in life. I like a joke myself. This was rather serious, but perhaps they will let me alone after this."

CHAPTER XIII.

STILL ENEMIES.

"I tell you I won't stand it!"

"Thin sit down, me b'y—sit down."

"You will have to stand it, Hodge, if you stay in Fardale Academy."

The fourth person in the room, Frank Merriwell, who was dusting the mantle, did not say anything; but there was a twinkle of merriment in his eyes, as he glanced toward the wrathful boy who was tramping furiously up and down, and beating the air with his clenched fists.

"What are you grinning about, Merriwell?" snarled the angry youth, wheeling fiercely around.

"Beg pardon, Hodge," said Frank, quietly. "Didn't know I grinned."

"Well, you did!" snarled Bartley Hodge, tossing his head, as if to throw back his curly black hair; "you grinned like a monkey."

"Unconscious imitation av what he was lookin' at," muttered Barney Mulloy.

"What's that?" snapped the irritated Hodge, turning on the Irish youth. "What did you say, Mulloy?"

"Nivver a wurrud to yez, me laddy-buck. It's me breath Oi wouldn't be afther wastin' on sich."

"I think you are all against me!" cried Hodge, accusingly.

"You should know better than that," said Ned Gray, with an air of protest. "We are not against you, but we

know it is folly to say we won't be hazed and we won't be domineered over by the yearlings. If you stay here, you will have to take your medicine with the rest of us."

"The prospectus of this academy stated there was no such thing as hazing known here. That's why father sent me here. I want you to know I have been to military schools before I ever saw Fardale, and——"

"Whoy didn't yez stay? Ye'd nivver been missed here!"

"What's that, Mulloy?"

"Nivver a wurrud."

"Well, you want to quit that muttering when I am talking. I don't like it."

"Thin yez may do th' nixt thing, me hearty," said the Irish lad, who seemed looking for trouble.

"Steady, fellows!" warned Ned Gray. "Don't quarrel. We'll have trouble enough from the outside, without getting into a growl among ourselves."

"They've no right to herd us up this way, four in a room," protested Hodge. "My father is a rich man, and he will pay——"

"It's only temporary, till we get our uniforms and are assigned to our companies," assured peaceful Ned. "You ought to be able to stand it a little while, Hodge."

"I might, if it wasn't for——"

He stopped and looked at Merriwell. That look was more expressive than words, and it was well understood.

Bart Hodge said he had "buried the hatchet," but Frank knew that behind Bart's expressed desire to let bygones be bygones there was lurking a secret feeling of malice that was destined to break out at any moment.

Merriwell looked up as Bart paused, and his face grew very grave.

"Why don't you say it, Hodge?" he asked. "Of course we all know what you mean."

Hodge tossed his head again.

"Then there is no need to say it among such knowing fellows," he sneered.

Frank put down the duster.

"Look here, Hodge," he said, "I thought we had called it quits. Are you going to revive the feud?"

"I don't suppose you fancied you and I could ever be friends, did you, Merriwell?"

"I don't ask your friendship—I don't want it. All I want to know is if we are to be foes."

"I am a fellow who always pays his debts."

"And that means—just what?"

"I owe you something."

"Then we are still enemies?"

"Yes. There, it is out! I'm not going to try to play the hypocrite any longer. I don't like you, Merriwell—in fact, I hate you! I can't help it, for I am one of the kind that never forgives nor forgets. You have injured me in ways I will not mention, and I am going to get even, if I live long enough. That's business."

Frank Merriwell's eyes were blazing.

"And you never made any attempt to injure me—oh, no!" he cried, with just indignation. "And is it possible that you imagine I have no score to settle with you, in case you revive the feud?"

Hodge snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"That for you and your score! I'll settle my own

account. I've not forgotten how you got the best of me by foul and contemptible trickery in the fight in Chadwick's pasture, and——"

Frank was now thoroughly aroused.

"If you accuse me of foul play in that case, Hodge, you are speaking words you know to be a lie!" he said, holding his voice steady as far as possible.

Bart started forward, his fists clenched, his dark face working with passion.

"Do you call me a liar?" he hissed—"do you dare?"

"You heard what I said."

Quick as a flash, Hodge caught up a chair and swung it over his head.

"Drop it, ye spalpane!" shouted Barney Mulloy, trying to catch the chair.

"I'll drop it—on his head!" grated Bart.

Whizz! the chair flew through the air. Crash! it struck the mirror, which was shattered to pieces, torn from its place, and fell to the floor.

Frank had dodged the chair.

Bartley might have followed up the attack, but the sound of quickly moving feet was heard in the corridor.

In a twinkling the four fellows faced the center of the room, heads up, heels together, eyes front, arms against the sides.

Open swung the door, and in strode Cadet Corporal Burrage, his blue coat fitting perfectly, with no trace of a wrinkle anywhere, collar, cuffs, and trousers spotless and dainty, buttons gleaming, and chevrons traced like pure gold on his sleeves.

His face wore a look that was stern, dignified and awe-inspiring. His manner was crushingly superior.

"What is the meaning of all this noise here?" he demanded, sharply. "Why is that chair overturned and the glass broken?"

No answer. It was Hodge's place to speak, but he remained silent.

Corporal Burrage pressed his lips together, and an angry light came into his eyes.

"Speak up, young gentlemen," he commanded, majestically. "Who was near that mirror when it was broken?"

"I was, sir," said Frank Merriwell.

"What were you doing?"

"Dusting, sir."

"And broke the mirror by reprehensible carelessness. Report to Lieutenant Swift, room 40, immediately after supper, sir. You must be taught the importance of carefulness and moderation. Carelessness is not tolerated in this academy, sir, as you will find out."

Then Cadet Corporal Burrage moved with great dignity from the room, leaving the four lads to stare at each other in silence some moments. Ned Gray was the first to speak.

"Why didn't you tell him you broke the mirror, Hodge?" he demanded, sharply. "Why did you keep still, and let him presume it was Merriwell?"

"Because he had no right to ask, the contemptible little puppy!" fiercely retorted Bart. "Didn't I say a few moments ago that I would not be domineered over by those upstarts!"

"But you left Merriwell in a bad scrape by keeping still."

"Why didn't Merriwell speak up and——"

"Because he has more honor in his little finger than ye have in yer whole body, ye spalpane!" cried Barney. "He'd nivver blow on yez, av ye didn't have th' dacency to spake, thot's th' koind av a b'y he is."

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERIOUS CAT.

After supper, having reported at room 40, new Cadet Merriwell was ordered to walk post in the hall till tattoo. He was but one of a number of offenders who were sentenced to similar punishment by Cadet Lieutenant Swift, who sat in judgment.

He submitted gracefully to the unavoidable, and was soon pacing up and down the hall, with his little fingers touching the seams of his trousers and his palms turned outward.

Among the other unfortunates Frank observed a round-faced, jolly-looking Dutch lad, who seemed to consider the whole matter a huge joke, and who winked at Merriwell every time they met on their respective posts.

"You shust wait till I gets me to be a lieutenant," he said, guardedly, to Frank. "You bet me your life I will make some son of a gun walk der soles off his shoes to ged me efen mit dis. Dot's der kindt of a hairbin Hans Dunnerwust vos, und don'd you vorged him."

Frank made no reply, for he had received strict orders to converse with no one, unless it should be in the line of duty. At the same time, he saw there was a fountain of fun in Hans Dunnerwust, and, being of a mischievous temperament, Frank resolved to have some sport with the Dutch lad.

A few moments later Bartley Hodge and Hugh Bascomb passed arm in arm through the hall.

"I say, Bart, old man," said Bascomb, with a contemptuous glance at Frank, "observe his royal highness."

"Oh, don't bother me with such things," sneered Bart. "They're beneath my notice."

The two fellows sauntered on, after waiting in vain for Frank to make some angry observation, which they would have reported as a breach of discipline.

Frank could feel his cheeks burning hotly, but he kept silent.

"My turn will come," he thought.

This little incident drove all thought of sport out of his head for the time, but he was soon forced to smile guardedly, as he saw Hans Dunnerwust come marching down the hall in an extravagant attitude of dignity.

Frank was a skillful ventriloquist, and so, making his voice seem to come from the far end of the hall, he cried:

"Halt!"

Hans stopped promptly.

"Right about face."

"Vell, I know dot," said the Dutch lad. "I vas always all righd apout mine face."

"Carry arms," came the mysterious voice.

"Yaw," nodded Hans, "I carry a pair uf arms; but I don'd vas any museum freak—I don'd haf more than a pair."

"Order arms!"

"Hey? Vot you mean py him? I don'd vant some wooden arms yed vile I haf dwo or dree uf mine own. I don'd orter no arms, you pet my poots."

"At place, rest."

"Dank you. I vos geddin' a leedle bit tired alretty yet"

Hans promptly sat down on the floor and leaned back against the wall. He looked around to see who had given the orders, and an expression of puzzled astonishment crept over his face, for there was no one at the end of the hall from whence that voice seemed to proceed.

"Dot vos funny," he muttered. "Dot veller must haf shkippted right away off. Maype dot vas bardt uf der deecerbleen uf dis school. Vell, nopody don'd haf to dell me to sid down dwice ven I am dired und vant a rest."

Down the hall came Corporal Burrage on a tour of inspection. His eyes fell on Hans, and, in a voice of thunder, he demanded:

"What is the meaning of this, sir? Attention!"

"Yaw," nodded the Dutch boy, without rising. "I gif you all der addention you vant. Uf you had anyding to say, say him."

"Get up!" cried Corporal Burrage, resolved to speak in a language Hans could not misunderstand. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Vell, I don'd know," was the innocent reply. "Maype you dell me vat all dis row you make apout."

"How happens it that I find you in such a position, sir? What do you mean by sitting down while walking post?"

"Vell, ven I come to dis agademy I make up mine mindt dot I opey der orters uf I pust a susbender-putton off ven I do him. Dot vas der madder mit me."

"Obey orders? What do you mean by that? You were ordered to walk post till tattoo."

"I don'd vant some tattoo on me. I don'd peen no museum freak pimepy yet avile alretty."

"Why didn't I find you walking post, as ordered?"

"Dot odder veller dells me to dake a rest."

"What other fellow?"

"I dunno. I don'd see him some ad all; but he come und gif der orters shoost a liddle vile ago pimepy."

Corporal Burrage began to understand.

"Somebody has been playing a practical joke on you," he said. "You should beware."

"Be vare?" asked Hans, innocently. "I'll be anyvare you say."

"Beware of these jokers. They will get you into trouble. Do not take orders from any one unless you see him. That's all. You may continue to walk post."

"Say!"

Corporal Burrage had started to walk onward; he whirled as if he had been shot.

"Sir-r-rah!" he thundered. "Never address a superior officer in such a manner again! Never address any one in this academy in such a manner. Always say 'sir.' Understand?"

"Yaw," stammered Hans.

"Yes, sir; not 'yaw.' Say 'Yes, sir.'"

Hans tried to obey the order, and succeeded fairly well.

"Now," said Corporal Burrage, "what is it you want to say?"

"Vere ish dot bost vat you vant me to valk? I had looked vor him afryvere, und I don'd vind him much alretty."

"Well, you keep right on looking."

Burrage was about to turn away again, when a sudden look of suspicion came to his face. He listened attentively.

"Me-e-eow!"

The sound was faint and muffled. Burrage could not

tell from whence it came, but he scented mischief. A cat in barracks meant that some joker had been at work. The animal must be found.

"Me-e-eow!"

Burrage looked all around, and Hans Dunnerwust did likewise.

"Did you hear it?" asked the cadet corporal.

"You pet me your shirt!" assured Hans.

"Where did it come from?"

"Vell, I don'd know dot alretty yet."

"Me-ee-ow!"

Burrage looked at Hans suspiciously, for the sound seemed to come from somewhere about the Dutch lad's person.

"You don't carry cats round in your pockets, do you, Dunnerwust?" asked the corporal.

"I don'd peen in der habit uf dot some," was the assurance.

Then Hans gave a jump and a gasp, as a feline wail seemed to issue from beneath his vest. He turned pale, and clasped both hands on his stomach.

A look of astonishment and anger settled swiftly on Burrage's face.

"What do you mean by this, sir?" he cried. "Produce that cat instantly."

Up went Han's hand under his vest, but he felt round in vain for the cat.

"I don'd find him," he said, weakly, perspiration beginning to start out on his fat face.

"Me-e-ow! Sp't sp't! Me-e-e-ye-e-ow!"

The final howl of agony was so long drawn and so intense that it nearly frightened the Dutch lad out of his

wits. He jerked his hand from beneath his vest, as if it had touched something red-hot, giving Burrage the impression that it had been bitten by the cat.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans, shaking with terror. "Vot vos der madder mit dot plamed cat?"

"Something will be the matter with you immediately, sir, if you do not produce that animal," said Burrage. "You are liable to find yourself lodged in the guard-house."

"I don'd peen aple to find dot cat," honestly declared Hans. "I gif you fife tollars uf you find him alretty soon for me."

"What do you mean by bringing a cat in here?"

"I nefer done him. Dot vas a misdake."

"A serious one for you. You will——"

"Ye-e-a-a-ow! Me-e-e-a-a-ow!"

Hans staggered backward, caught his heel, and sat down heavily on the floor. His fall was followed by a smothered howl that was positively appalling in its intense agony.

"Get up!" cried Burrage. "You have sat on that cat! You have crushed it to death!"

"Vell, I don'd know how dot cat got in dot bart uf mine clothes," gasped the Dutch boy.

Another howl brought him to his feet.

"Oxcuse me!" he shouted. "I vas goin' to shange dis suit bretty soon alretty. I'll pe back ven I find der cat."

In his confusion he made a rush for the stairs, unmindful that his room did not lie in that direction, and without heeding Burrage's orders to halt. As he reached the head of the stairs, he ran plump into Professor Gunn, who was just coming up.

Down the stairs, bumpety-bump, bumpety-bump, slid the professor on his back, with the Dutch boy seated securely astride his stomach, and clinging with both hands to the professor's hair, which was long and luxuriant.

CHAPTER XV.

FURTHER TROUBLE.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans Dunnerwust.
"I vas kilt alretty yet!"

Bump! they struck at the bottom of the stairs.

"Murder! Robbers!" howled the professor, clinging to Hans, with the idea in his dazed brain that he had been murderously assaulted.

"Preak away!" squawked the Dutch boy, trying to get up.

Over they rolled upon the floor.

"Villain!" gasped the professor; "you shall not escape!"

In his excitement, he struck Hans a heavy blow in the left eye.

The boy had not recognized the professor, and this was quite enough to arouse him to resentment.

"Vell, I pet you your life I know a little someding about dot peesness mineseluf!" he shouted, as he struck out in return. "I don'd peen no Shim Gorbett, put some-dimes I get dere shust der same, an't it!"

In another moment they were fighting furiously at the foot of the stairs, and the cadets, who had been attracted by the uproar, began to gather around.

"Go it, Old Gunn!" shouted some one, under cover of the excitement. "Show your stuff!"

"Baste him, Dutchy!" cried another. "I'll back you for a winner!"

The battle might have continued some time, but the

older cadets interfered and dragged the two apart. Hans and the professor sat up and looked at each other. Hans clasped a hand over one eye, while the professor clasped both hands to his nose. They appeared somewhat battered and the worse for wear, and they presented a comical spectacle as they sat there staring at each other. It was not strange that the boys roared with laughter, in spite of the boasted discipline of Fardale Academy, and then, realizing they were in danger of severe punishment, most of them scudded away, while the others pretended to be very solicitous over the professor's misfortune.

"What is the meaning of all this may I inquire?" came weakly from Professor Zenas Gunn, who glared at Hans. "Why am I assaulted in this murderous manner? Is it a plot to assassinate me?"

"Vell, I dunno," muttered Hans, still dazed. "I feel like I hat sdruck a cyglone pretty soon alretty yet."

Corporal Burrage was on hand, and he offered an explanation, to which Professor Gunn tried to listen with dignity, although he must have been fully aware that he presented a ludicrous and woe-begone appearance.

Frank Merriwell had been startled by the result of his joking, and he feared that he had gotten Hans into a serious scrape; but he hoped leniency would be shown the Dutch boy, so he might get off with slight punishment, if any.

Realizing that his ventriloquial powers might provide amusement for him in the future or stand him in good stead in some way, Merriwell did not wish to confess the truth, which he might otherwise have done had there been any danger that some one would have to suffer for anything for which he was responsible.

Frank remained in the hall above, walking post as if nothing had occurred.

Below, the cadets were dispersed, and Hans was marched away, with the professor in advance and several cadet officers at his heels. The mysterious cat had not appeared, and Corporal Burrage presumed the creature had escaped from Hans and fled when the boy and the professor tobogganed down the stairs.

Frank had succeeded in breaking the monotony of walking post, and he now continued tramping up and down in silence, hearing the subdued strains of the band that was playing somewhere on the grounds outside.

Thus the entire evening till tattoo was spent.

On entering his room, Frank found three very excited boys holding an excited discussion. He first heard Bartley Hodge loudly declaring:

"If there is an attempt made to haze me, the fellows who are in it will be sorry. I have stood enough here, and I am not going to stand any more."

"What will you do?" asked Ned Gray.

"Fight," was the fierce reply, and Bart certainly looked as if he meant to do so.

"You will get the worst of it."

"If I find out who the hazers are, I will report them."

"And thus make yourself a fellow marked for roasting as long as you remain in this academy."

"Not much. I tell you, most fellows who come here submit too easily to abuse. If they would show some spirit, these caddish upstarts would think all the more of them."

Frank said nothing, but approached the corner where Barney Mulloy was preparing for bed.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Oi dunno," replied the Irish lad. "It sames thot Hodge has been tipped a bit av a wink that some av th' b'ys are goin' to roon him through th' mill roight away soon."

"What did they do with Hans Dunnerwust?"

"Nivver a thing."

"Did they let him go?"

"Yis."

"He didn't return to walk post?"

"No; he wur sint to his room to hiv a sloice av bafe toied over th' oie where Ouid Gunn gave him th' crack with his knuckles. Faith, th' Doochman's oie is a soight, so it is. Some av th' lads got him outsoide afther he had his oie attinded, an' it's barrels av foon they had wid th' gossoon. Ye'd die av laughin' to hear th' duck tell av th' cat that crawled inther him somewhere, but nivver a bit did he know where. Doochy says it wur yawlin' an' squawlin' to bate th' band, but he couldn't locate th' baste till he shlipped an' sat doon, an' thin by th' howl it gave he knew th' crayther must be somewhere around his hip-pocket. He was so scared thot he shtarted fer his room, an' he roon shtraight inther th' professor. It wud give yez a himmorrhage to hear him tell how aisy he shlid doon th' shtairs, sated on th' professor's digestive apparatus. Be me soul, thot Doochman is th' fooniest duck Oi ivver shtruck in all me loife!"

That Barney relished anything of a humorous turn was evident by his manner, for he laughed till he was almost purple in the face.

Hodge continued to rave up and down the room, till Frank suddenly said:

"There is but one minute before taps, Mr. Hodge. It

is my duty to see that the light is out promptly taps are sounded."

With the exception of Bartley, all the lads were ready for retiring. He paused and glanced contemptuously at Frank, but said nothing. He did not offer to undress.

A short time later, taps sounded.

As Frank stepped quickly toward the lamp, Bartley faced him, saying:

"You needn't bother, Merriwell; I will blow it out."

"But it is my place to extinguish the lamp this week."

"Never mind; I will attend to it to-night."

"But I am not in the habit of leaving my duties for another to do."

Bartley's lips curled.

"Indeed!" he sneered. "A perfect slave of duty! Without doubt, you will be high-muck-a-muck among the cadets before you leave Fardale. You would make a fine special pet for Old Gunn!"

Frank's teeth came together with a click, but he held fast to his temper, saying, quietly:

"Please stand aside, Mr. Hodge—I wish to extinguish that light."

"Oh, don't put on any airs with me. I will look after the lamp, so pile into bed."

With a quick step and a strong sweep of his arm, Frank cast the dark-faced lad aside and reached the light, which he immediately blew out.

With an angry snarl Hodge struck at Merriwell in the darkness, and the blow landed glancingly on Frank's neck, sending him staggering. He recovered as quickly as possible, hearing a rush of feet, and a savage panting right at his hand.

"Keep off, Hodge!" he warned.

"I'll fix you now!" were the vindictive words hissed in his ear.

Then the foes clinched, and a desperate struggle began in the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

VISITED BY THE "JOLLY FIENDS."

"Stop it!" palpitated Ned Gray, leaping toward the struggling lads. "You'll bring the whole academy down on us!"

"I don't care!" grated Hodge. "I'll settle with Merriwell here and now!"

Smack—thud! A blow, and a fall.

"Are yez all roight, Frankie, me b'y?" came the anxious voice of Barney Mulloy.

"I think so," returned Frank, cautiously.

"What's happened?" asked Ned Gray, in an awed whisper.

"I struck Hodge," was the quiet answer. "It was a chance blow as we broke holds, but I think I have knocked him out."

"Hurro!" breathed Barney, in delight. "Merriwell foriver! He's th' b'y!"

"I hope the scuffle and Hodge's fall were not heard," came anxiously from Frank. "I believe some one is coming! Into bed, Gray! I will stow Hodge beside you. Lively!"

[Lively work it certainly was. Into bed Ned leaped, and Frank lifted his foe from the floor, quickly depositing him at Gray's side, giving the blanket a switching throw that covered the unconscious lad, clothes and all, to the chin.]

There were swift moving feet on the stairs, and then they came along the hall.

With one great bound, Frank reached his own bed, and plunged in at Barney's side.

Bang! Open came the door, and the light of a reflector lamp was flung into the room.

The light showed four lads in bed, while everything seemed to be in order about the room. The fact that Cadet Hodge's clothes were not hanging in their proper place must have escaped the eyes of the inspector, for the door closed, and the footsteps passed on.

"Be me soul!" gasped Barney Mulloy, sitting up in bed. "But thot wur a chlose shave, b'ys!"

"That's right," agreed Ned Gray, also sitting up. "I say, Merriwell, you must have struck Hodge a fearful blow. He is awful still."

"I did strike him pretty hard," acknowledged Frank; "but I didn't think it would stun him like this."

"He doesn't stir," whispered Ned, in an awed way. "He doesn't even seem to breathe! I'm afraid he's hurt pretty bad."

Frank got up, his heart sinking. Already he was sorry for the blow, which had been delivered in the heat of Hodge's sudden assault, and the ominous silence of his enemy gave him a shivery feeling, as if his blood has congealed in his veins.

What if Hodge were seriously injured? What if that blow, delivered in self-defense, had broken the fellow's neck?

Such a thing was by no means an impossibility, and Frank Merriwell shuddered with horror as he thought what must follow in case it should be true.

There was nothing malicious or vicious in Frank's nature, and he had struck the blow purely in self-de-

fense, without thinking of the possibility of serious consequences. Nor had it given him a single thrill of joy to know he had knocked Hodge out with a single stroke, as he realized it was purely a matter of accident, and his blow might have been guarded or dodged had his enemy seen it coming.

Steadying his nerves, Frank got lightly out of bed, and hurried to the side of the unconscious lad.

In truth Hodge lay ominously still. It was with no little reluctance that Merriwell felt for the fellow's heart, but a sigh of relief came from his lips when he felt that organ pulsating regularly beneath his hand.

"He will come round all right, I think," whispered Frank, as he gave the dark-haired lad a shake. "Come, come, Hodge, stir up here."

Bart groaned a bit, and then caught his breath with a gasp, but made no effort to sit or stir up.

"Bring me some water, Mulloy," directed Frank. "Be still about it. We don't want that fellow to come back here with the light."

The water was brought, and Merriwell used it to bathe Hodge's face and temples. This seemed to revive the stunned boy, who soon began to breathe regularly, and finally pushed Frank's hand away, muttering:

"Don't! It's wet."

"How do you feel, Hodge?" asked Ned Gray, who was still anxious. "Are you all right?"

"Feel? What do you mean? Of course I'm all right. What's happened, anyway?"

"Sh! Don't speak so loud, or you will be heard. You were struck, and——"

"Struck? Who did it? I remember! Merriwell, he——"

"Tapped yez a dainty one, me laddybuck," chuckled Barney, who was delighted by the way things had turned. "Bechune this an' yer other foight wid him, Oi think ye will be afther takin' a toomble thot he is by far th' best b'y wid his dukes."

Bart sat up, although it cost him an effort to do so, and there was a strange buzzing in his head.

"It was an accident," he savagely muttered. "I could not see him, and I slipped. My head struck the floor, and dazed me. Merriwell is a good fighter—in the dark, where the other fellow can't see him."

"Say, will you keep still!" hissed Ned Gray, giving Bart a nudge. "You seem determined to get yourself and the rest of us into trouble to-night."

"I told him not to blow out the light."

"And you knew an inspecting officer would have been here in less than a minute if the light had not been blown out. It is Merriwell's place to see that it is extinguished, and he would have suffered for it."

"Oh, you fellows are all against me!" snarled Bart, as he lay down again. "But I have friends. I will show you that I've got as many friends as Merriwell. We'll see who will stand ahead in this academy—we'll see!"

Frank had kept silent, glad to let the matter drop for the time. He scarcely heard Bartley's muttered words, and, being fatigued by the severe drilling through which he had passed that day, he soon fell asleep.

Twice Ned asked Hodge if he did not intend to undress, but the fellow kept a sullen silence, and so Gray

finally drifted away into the land of dreams, with Bartley, still dressed, lying in the bed and outlining a hundred plots for vengeance on the lad he hated with a bitterness that seemed to increase with each passing moment.

Having a proud and sensitive nature, as well as a fierce temper, Hodge felt humiliated and disgraced, and his bosom was full of bitterest rancor. Over and over he told himself that he could kill Merriwell.

Bartley's father was the richest man in the town where he resided, and Bart had been brought up in a way that usually spoils a lad. In his home he had been petted and indulged in every way, and in the village he had been something of a monarch among the boys, for he had spent money quite freely, and boys generally in the country are inclined to fawn on the fellow who has plenty of money.

In fact, Bartley had been so indulged and spoiled that his father decided the only way to save him and make anything of him was to send him to a military school, where he would be forced to take his chance with other lads, and would receive no favors.

From the first school to which Bart was sent, he wrote home the most pitiful and indignant letters, describing the "indignities" and "abuses" which he was compelled to suffer. His father smiled, and would have let the boy remain; but his mother raised such a hue-and-cry that Mr. Hodge was finally forced to take his son out of the school.

Then Bart was sent to another academy, but this proved no better. Mr. Hodge, however, refused to take him out. For all of this, he did not remain long. He soon committed an act that brought about his expulsion.

By this time Bart's father was thoroughly angry, and

he made up his mind that the boy must remain at the next school to which he was sent. He expressed himself with decision and force to his wife and his son. To the latter, he said:

"Fardale Military Academy is said to be one of the best schools of the kind in the country. I am going to send you there, and you are going to stay there till you are fitted for college. I shall not take you out on any condition, and, if you are expelled, you need not come back here looking for any further assistance from me. I shall set you adrift in the world to hoe your own row. That is business!"

Knowing his father as he did, Bart realized it was indeed "business," and he had no desire to be expelled from Fardale Academy, although it seemed very humiliating to be forced to mingle with "ordinary fellows" and have no better things nor receive no more favors than he would if his father were barely able to pay his tuition.

Bart thought this all over as he lay there, and his heart was hot against his father for making him face the music in such a manner.

"Still, I believe I'd get along first rate if Merriwell got it in the neck," thought the musing lad. "If I could put up a job to get him expelled, I'd be quite happy and contented."

Thus thinking and plotting, he finally fell asleep.

He awoke to feel himself roughly shaken and heard a guarded whisper:

"Awake from thy slumber, plebe. Your presence is earnestly desired at a little matinee to be held immediately."

"Who are you? and what do you want?" he sleepily asked.

A light from a dark lantern was flashed in his face.

"We are the Jolly Fiends of Fardale," replied a disguised voice; "and we want you."

The light was flashed round the room, and he saw it was filled with boys who wore masks over their faces!

CHAPTER XVII.

NO ESCAPE.

"Hazers!"

Bart gasped the word, sitting up suddenly. The light was flung upon him again, blinding him by its brightness, and he heard a laughing voice say:

"Behold, comrades! the chosen one is already dressed for the occasion."

Something like a hoarse chuckle ran round the room, sounding hollowly from behind the masks.

Ned Gray awoke and turned over.

"What's the row now?" he asked, in a sleepy voice.

"Silence!" sternly commanded the leader of the Jolly Fiends. "If you speak louder than a whisper, may your doom be on your head."

"So mote it be!" came in a hushed and solemn murmur from the masked cadets.

"Oxcuse me!" muttered Barney Mulloy. "Oi'm not at home this avening." And under the bedclothes he ducked.

Frank Merriwell was wide awake, but he kept still and said nothing, knowing that this was the best thing he could do.

But Merriwell was not to escape, having been selected for the "matinee" by the Jolly Fiends. Having discovered he did not sleep with Hodge, the leader said:

"Fellow-Fiends, our second victim must repose on yonder cot. Cause him to arise and prepare to go forth or fifth with us."

In another moment, Frank was pounced upon and ordered to get up immediately and dress.

"All right, gentlemen," he said, with resignation. "But I presume you will allow me sufficient time to draw up my last will and testament before I am led forth to the slaughter?"

"Silence! If you are given time to say your prayers before standing face to face with your doom, you should be well satisfied. Arise."

"O. K. Arise it is."

Frank got out of bed quietly, and began to dress himself.

Bart, however, was not so willing to take his medicine.

"I will not get up!" he declared. "I refuse to be hazed, and if you do not leave this room immediately I will——"

"What?"

"I'll raise a rumpus that will arouse the whole academy."

"Oh, no, you won't!" came grimly from the leader of the masks. "You will get up quietly, and take great care not to make enough noise to awaken anybody. I don't think you want to see your own brains scattered all over the wall, and this may bring you to realize that we are in deadly earnest."

Something bright and shiny showed in the speaker's steady hand, as the light flashed for a second upon it, and then Hodge felt a cold muzzle pressed against his forehead. The touch gave him a thrill of fear, and he gasped:

"You—you wouldn't dare!"

"Wouldn't I?" was the deep, hoarse whisper that came back from the leader of the masks, who now seemed

terribly in earnest. "I warn you not to force me into daring. I give you my word of honor that, as true as this weapon ever cracked a cartridge and sent a bullet with deadly force from its muzzle, I shall pull the trigger and it will plant another bullet in your head, if you raise a row. Take a tumble, and get up."

"This is an outrage! I will report it!"

"If you get rantankerous, you may not find an opportunity to report it, sir. It is a sad thing for one like you to die so young."

"And so fair," murmured another voice.

"Hodge says it an't fair at all at all," muttered Barney Mulloy, who had ventured to peer out from beneath the clothes.

"I never before heard of such a dastardly outrage!" Bart grated. "The idea of using a revolver to compel a fellow to take a hazing! It is criminal!"

"Be careful, sir!" warned the leader of the Jolly Fiends. "Every word you speak is noted and recorded, and you will have to answer for it. Take warning!"

But Bart was too angry and too stubborn to be warned in such a manner.

"Old Gunn shall hear of this," he panted. "Some of you fellows will be expelled for this bit of work, mark what I say!"

"Yes," said the leader, "mark what he says—mark it in the book of records, and let him answer for it in the day of judgment. Then there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and great shall be the fall thereof, even though it is in the spring of the year."

Bart was tempted to raise a shout, for all of that menacing weapon. But what if the revolver should be accidentally discharged? This shout might startle the

yellow so he would press the trigger. A cold chill ran over the dark-haired boy, for the muzzle of the terrible weapon kept steadily staring upon him. He grated his teeth, and then he started and shuddered again, for every one of those masked figures echoed the sound from behind the masks.

"There is not a false molar among them all," said the leader, cheerfully. "You should hear them crunching and snapping the bones of our last victim! Ah, it was sweet, sweet music! Methinks or methunks I can hear it even now."

"What rot!" exclaimed Bart, but he took care to speak softly. "You fellows are making blooming fools of yourselves!"

"But we will make a still more blooming fool of you," was the pleasant assurance. "Get up!"

"Well, I guess I can stand it if Merriwell can."

Hodge got up, and the hazers, who had really feared he would raise a rumpus, began to believe there was a possibility that they would carry out their plot successfully.

"Remove those shoes from thy pedal extremities," directed the leader.

Bart obeyed.

By this time Frank was sufficiently dressed, and one of the masked fellows slowly and gently raised the window. Then he thrust out his head for the purpose of making an inspection.

"The coast is clear," he quickly declared, drawing back and securing the window. "I will go ahead."

Then he climbed over the sill, swung down by his hands, and dropped. As the room was on the second story, he did not have far to fall, and he landed lightly,

like a cat, upon his feet. A second and a third followed, and then Merriwell was ordered to make the drop.

Frank did not hold back. As quietly as he could, he got out over the sill, and hung by his hands. Then, pushing himself out a bit from the wall with his knee, he let go and dropped, doing the trick as skillfully as the others had done.

Then came three more wearers of masks, and Hodge followed them. He made some noise in getting through the window, but was warned again by the leader, who stood beside him, with the terrible weapon ready for instant use.

When Hodge had made the drop, the leader of the Jolly Fiends turned to two of his masked companions, saying:

"You are to stay and keep guard over the plebes here. When you hear the signal, let down the knotted rope for us. It is not likely we shall be back inside of two hours."

"Correct, your royal muchness," was the reply. "We will look after these two plebes. But what if they attempt to kick up a racket?"

"Beat out their brains with the pillows on these beds," was the order. "Those pillows are far more deadly than this revolver in my hand. A blow from one of them is enough to shatter the strongest constitution. Farewell."

Then he crept out through the window and dropped.

On striking the ground he found himself quite alone, but that did not seem to surprise him. He had his shoes in his hand almost as soon as he struck the ground, as they had been concealed about his person all the time, and he quickly darted round to the back of the academy, scudded under the shadow of the tall elm trees, and was

soon with a little band who were putting on their shoes by the guardhouse.

Hodge's and Merriwell's shoes had been brought along, and they were putting them on. Hodge was still growling about the outrage of forcing a fellow to be hazed at the muzzle of a revolver.

"You talk a great deal with your mouth, young man!" said the leader of the masks, in disgust. "Here, take a good look at that deadly revolver!"

Some one produced the dark lantern and flashed the light upon the weapon, which the speaker had produced from one of his pockets.

Hodge gave a gasp of surprise and disgust as he saw what lay in the open hand of the leader of the Jolly Fiends.

It was simply a nickel-covered water-faucet, such as are in common use on water pipes!

CHAPTER XVIII.

HANS SINGS A SONG.

A groan came from Bart Hodge's lips, and, had they not been so near the academy, the boys would have roared with laughter. It was a joke that every one but Hodge thoroughly enjoyed.

"I—I don't believe it," he said, weakly. "I don't believe that was the weapon you held against my head. I heard you cock it—I heard it click."

"You have a very vivid imagination, sir," said the leader of the masks, as he restored the faucet to his pocket and continued putting on his shoes. "I assure you that you are mistaken."

"If I had known, I'd—I'd——"

"What?"

"I'd raised such a rumpus that you wouldn't have worked your little racket so far. By thunder, I'm going to do it now! I'll shout——"

"If you do," came sternly from the leader of the Fiends, "I will agree to see that you receive the worst hammering you ever ran up against in all your life. We'll all get a crack at you, and you will not look very pretty in the morning. Eh, comrades?"

"Correct, your royal muchness," came from every one of the masked lads.

Bart hesitated. He did not relish the idea of being pounded by a gang of masked fellows whom he didn't know. If he had known them all, so he might report

them, he would have set up a shout without delay. As it was, he said:

"Oh, well, you've got me out here, and I suppose I may as well see the matter through; but I give you fair warning that you want to be careful what you do to me."

"Oh, yes, we'll be careful!" came from several of the cadets, and the way they spoke the words gave Bart a very shivery feeling.

In a few moments all had their shoes on, and then, following the leader, they slipped across the grounds, keeping beneath the shadows of the trees and close to the walls of the buildings, skirted the plain, and finally reached the limit of the grounds without being seen.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Bart.

"Keep still, and you will find out," was the sharp reply.

Leaving the grounds, they proceeded with less caution, but still maintaining silence. They came to the shore of the cove on which the academy was located, and this they followed for at least half a mile.

Finally a private boathouse was reached. From within came the sounds of boisterous merriment, as if a great collection of young fellows had assembled within, and Bart suddenly grew desperate, resolving to make a break for liberty, rather than go in there.

It seemed as if his very thoughts were surmised, for hands were placed firmly on his arms, and he found he could not get away if he wished, so he gave over the desperate project.

A peculiar rap on the door of the boathouse caused the merriment within to be hushed quickly. The rap was repeated, and then the door opened.

"Enter," ordered the leader of the Jolly Fiends, and Bart was forced to march in.

Frank followed quietly.

The boathouse seemed swarming with masked lads, and the cause of their merriment soon became apparent, for Hans Dunnerwust was there, his fat face painted like that of a wild Indian about to take the warpath, and his hair filled full of feathers which looked as if they had been plucked from the tails of half-a-dozen different roosters. With a wooden tomahawk and scalping knife in his hands, he had just finished a wild war dance that had quite put him out of breath, and he was puffing and gasping in the middle of the floor.

The appearance of Hodge and Merriwell was hailed with a shout of delight from the masked cadets assembled in the boathouse, and they all began to sing:

"We'll give them the rink of the blinkety-blink,
And crush their weak bones, ker-chunk;
We'll give them the spank of the blankety-blank,
And laugh at their moans, ker-plunk."

"Ker-chunk" and "ker-plunk" at the end of the second and fourth lines were brought out with great emphasis. Immediately, as if by a mutual understanding, the song changed to this:

"Let us all unite in love,
While Old Gunn's asleep above;
Let us all unite in love,
And give these plebes a gentle shove.

"In the neck, in the neck they will get it,
In the neck, in the neck, where it fits;
If you laugh when they squeal, you will hit it,
For they'll get it in the neck, where it fits."

The door closed behind the new delegation and their victims, being securely fastened.

Hans Dunnerwust gave a sigh of relief as he saw Frank and Bart.

"Vell, maype I don'd vas glat you haf come!" he exclaimed. "Maype dese vellers a rest vill gif me now, ain'd id?"

But Hans was not to escape yet.

"You haven't taken your third degree, Cadet Dunnerwust," said the master of ceremonies. "Nor have you sung that song we desire to hear so very much."

"Vell, don'd I dell you I didn't know how to sing pretty goot?"

"You are altogether too modest, sir. I am sure that any one with such a musical voice as yours can sing divinely. Take your place in the center of the room there, and begin at once."

Hans stood helplessly on the spot indicated, but he was the picture of despair as he looked all around.

"Vot shall I sing?" he asked.

"You might carol that tender little ditty entitled 'Who Threw Mush in Willie's Eye?'" suggested one.

"I don'd know him."

"Then you may warble 'He Had a Little Eyebrow Growing on His Lip.'"

"I don'd know him."

"Is it possible! I fear your musical education has been sadly neglected. Give us a few stanzas of 'How He Rambled Through His Brother's Appetite.'"

"Vell, I don'd know him, eder."

"This is sincerely distressing," sighed the leader. "What can you sing?"

"Vell, I haf heard dot song caldt 'Bull for der Shore.'"

"Very well; you may give us 'Bull for der Shore.'"

"Vait a minute till I think me of him. Id vas peen more as zwei week before I heardt dot song der last time."

Hans scratched his head and looked puzzled, but finally grinned and announced:

"I haf him."

Then he took in a deep breath, threw back his head, and began to sing, in the most discordant manner imaginable:

"Bull for der shore, sailor, bull for der shore,
Ged inter dot lifeboat, undt ged off der roof,
Shbit on your handts, sailor, undt let her rip,
Uf you don'd prace ub, you ged left alretty yet."

There was something so ludicrous about Hans' effort to sing and the manner in which he had twisted the words of the hymn about that the listeners, with the exception of Bart Hodge, roared with laughter.

Frank Merriwell was actually enjoying every minute of the time, and he had enjoyed it since the appearance of the masked cadets in his room at barracks. He had made up his mind to take what might come and make as little fuss about it as possible, and he did not worry over what was in store for himself.

On the other hand, while Bart would have enjoyed it hugely had he been one of the hazers, he felt that he was humiliated in the eyes of his companions, and that cut his sensitive spirit keenly, so, under the circumstances, he did not enjoy it at all.

Hans stopped singing, and twenty voices shouted:

"Go on, sir—go on!"

"Bud I don'd know any more of dot song."

"Sing it over again."

With a sickly grin, the Dutch boy did as directed.

"Louder! louder!" was the cry.

So he sang louder, and he was told to keep singing it over and over till directed to stop.

"Louder! louder!" shouted the masked roysterers.

Hans shut both eyes tightly, and opened his mouth to its greatest capacity, and roared out the words as loudly as he could. He was repeating the stanza for the sixth time when something happened.

Spat! A rotten apple, flung by an unerring hand, struck the Dutch boy fairly in the mouth.

The song ended very abruptly.

CHAPTER XIX.

GHOSTLY SOUNDS.

The decayed apple came near choking the unfortunate boy to death, and it caused him to spit and splutter and gurgle in a most distressing manner. Some of it was spattered over his painted face, and he presented a most pitiful spectacle.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" he gurgled. "Vot vas dot? Id tasted like it haf been egsbosed to injury alretty yet."

The way he uttered the words threw the cadets into convulsions. The boathouse rang with their shouts of laughter.

"This is a disgrace!" grated Bart Hodge. "It shall be reported to Professor Gunn."

"I presume you will report it?" said one of the masked Fiends.

"That I will," was the ready assurance.

Immediately Bart's words were repeated so that all those assembled could hear them, and Bart found that he had drawn an unenviable amount of attention on himself.

"I think we will give Cadet Dunnerwust a rest, and devote some of our valuable time and attention to Cadet Hodge," observed the master of ceremonies. "By his language, just quoted, it is evident that he looks upon our noble order with disfavor. What shall be done with him?"

"Run him through the mill!" roared more than a score of voices.

Instantly Bart was seized and hustled in a manner that bewildered him and took away his breath. From side to side he was tossed, and when he stumbled and would have fallen, he was caught up and kept moving. He tried to strike out in defense, but his blows encountered nothing but air. His teeth were clenched and his eyes blazing with unutterable fury, yet he found himself utterly helpless in the hands of the masked lads.

"Oh, you shall pay dearly for this!" he panted.

Then, when he was so weak that his legs threatened to give way beneath him, they caught him up, and, before he could comprehend their scheme, he found himself on his back on a piece of sailcloth. Around the sailcloth stood a circle of lads who grasped the edges.

"Bounce him!" commanded a voice, and Bart was tossed, writhing and kicking, into the air.

Down he came on the sailcloth, and up he went again, before he could get his breath. Again and again, he went higher with each toss, till he touched the rafters away up toward the roof. His head swam, and the breath seemed torn and jounced from his lips. A feeling of nausea seized him, and still that terrible tossing went on.

When it was all over, Bart Hodge was too weak to stand, and much of his spirit had been taken out of him for the time being, at least. He was pale about the mouth, and he sank in a nerveless heap to the floor.

"Give him a few moments to get his breath," said the leader. "We'll take a whirl at the other victim now."

Frank knew it was his turn.

"What have you to say about it, Mr. Merriwell?" he was asked.

"Not a word," was the quiet reply.

"I suppose you mean to report this affair to Old Gunn."

"Not if I can help it," was the reply. "I am not in the habit of telling things when the joke is on me."

"Do you mean that you won't tell?"

"Not unless I have to."

"He's saying that so you will go light with him," came huskily from Bart. "That's his little game."

"Well, he has made an error in that case," said the leader. "We never let up on anybody. The fellow who gets into Fardale and stays here has to take the regular course, no matter who he is."

Bart laughed, sneeringly:

"It didn't work, did it, Merriwell!" he cried.

At that moment, apparently just outside the door, a dog began to bark loudly. The boys looked startled.

"Wonder whose dog that is?" speculated one. "Can it be somebody is prowling around here?"

"The sentries have given us no warning."

"That must be a stray dog. Somebody drive him away."

The door was opened, and the barking ceased, but not a sign of a dog could be found.

"Well, he scudded away quick," said the lad who had started to drive him away.

He closed the door, and barely had he done so when the dog gave a most dismal and mournful howl.

Quick as a flash, he flung the door open and jumped out, but not a sign of the creature supposed to be close outside could he discover, and he re-entered in a minute, looking all round the room, and showing by his manner that he was puzzled

The instant the door was closed that mysterious howling burst forth again.

The boys looked from one to another in dismay.

"What in thunder is the meaning of it?" muttered one. "It has a ghostly sound."

"That's so," nodded another. "And that makes me think of the story about old Jake Henderson being murdered in this very place. His dog stayed by the body and howled till somebody came. When Henderson was buried, the dog stayed by the grave night and day, and howled himself to death."

"Perhaps that is the ghost of Henderson's dog that we hear howling outside."

The suggestion caused more than one to shiver, and the laugh that followed the words was not a very hearty one.

"Who believes in ghosts!" cried one lad, derisively. "That's all rot! I'm not afraid—— Hark! What's that?"

They listened, and the sound was repeated—a hollow, awful groan. Where it came from no one seemed able to tell.

"Holy Moses!" gurgled the fellow who had just declared he was not afraid of ghosts. "I don't exactly like the sound of that."

The way he said this, and the change in his manner, brought a burst of laughter from the boys, but they hushed quickly when the groan again echoed hollowly through the room.

"Jupiter!" said a tall boy. "I believe it comes from the roof."

"And I think it cuc-cuc-cuc-comes from under the fuf-fuf-fuf-floor," chattered a short boy.

"Listen!"

"I cannot rest! I cannot rest! The grave is dark and cold."

All heard the words distinctly, and more than one felt his hair trying to stand erect on his head.

"Great Jupiter!" whispered an unsteady voice, distinctly heard in the hush that followed. "I guess it is old Henderson's ghost for sure, boys!"

"Not much!" stoutly declared the leader of the hazers. "Henderson was most illiterate. He never said 'cannot' in all his life. He would have said 'can't rest.'"

"Perhaps he has been studying grammar since his departure from this mundane sphere," suggested another fellow.

"Some one is trying to work a joke on us," said the leader, with decision. "I am sure of it. Six of you follow me lively, and we will see if we can't catch the chap."

Out of the door he dashed, and he was quickly followed by the required number, while the rest remained and discussed Henderson's murder and ghosts in general.

Frank Merriwell was taking things easy, quite satisfied by his success in diverting attention from himself for the time, for it was he who had, by the aid of his ventriloquial powers, produced all the mysterious sounds that had been heard. He had known nothing of the murder of Henderson and the devotion of the murdered man's dog. It was quite by chance that he had chosen to make it seem that a dog was howling at the door of the boathouse. The talk that had followed between the Jolly Fiends had

given him his cue to work upon, and he had succeeded to his complete satisfaction.

"What's the use of being hazed, if you can't have some fun at the same time?" thought Frank.

The party who had gone outside were absent nearly ten minutes, when they returned, looking disgusted and baffled.

"What did you find?" was the question that greeted them.

"Not a thing," they replied. "There's no one anywhere around outside."

"But we heard the voice distinctly, and the dog——"

From just beyond the door a long-drawn howl of agony seemed to proceed from the throat of the mysterious dog.

"Howl, confound you!" grated the leader of the Jolly Fiends. "You can't howl enough to scare me away! I'm going to stay right here till these plebes are put through the entire course of sprouts. That's the kind of fellow I am."

"And I am going to see what your face looks like!" shouted Bart Hodge. "That's the kind of a fellow I am!"

With a panther-like spring, he reached a position where he could snatch the mask from the leader's face, and this he accomplished with astonishing swiftness.

The face revealed was that of Walter Burrage, corporal of cadets!

CHAPTER XX.

BURRAGE IN A BAD FIX.

"You are a very good-looking fellow," sneered the triumphant Bart; "but this night's work will cost you your chevrons, if it does not cause you to be expelled from Fardale Academy. Oh, you won't put on so many airs after this!"

Burrage was pale and not a little frightened, for he realized it would be a very serious thing for him if Hodge really "blowed" to Professor Gunn. He saw he was in a bad scrape, for Bart was just the kind of a fellow to report the whole matter, and he was the sort of a lad who could not be easily frightened out of anything he had made up his mind to do.

Frank was sorry for Burrage, but that did not help the matter any.

"Look here, Mr. Hodge," said the unmasked hazer, "I hope you do not mean that you really intend to blow?"

"Well, you can bet your life I do mean it! Do you fancy I am the kind of a fellow to be run through the mill and not take an opportunity to get square?"

"I thought it possible you might not wish to get every cadet in the academy down on you, as they certainly will be if you report this matter to Professor Gunn."

"That kind of a bluff won't go with me," was Bart's haughty retort. "I didn't come to Fardale to be made a monkey of, and I am going to stand up for my rights."

"You will find you have no easy life to live here, if you begin by blowing."

Bart snapped his fingers in Burrage's face.

"I tell you the bluff won't go with me. I've got you now, and I'll pay you back for dragging me out of my bed and bringing me here to have sport with. If other fellows who come here and are hazed would show a little more spirit and 'blow' occasionally, I fancy the Jolly Fiends would soon cease to exist."

Burrage was desperate. Hodge had insulted him by words and manner, but he could not afford to resent it, although the hot blood had flushed the cheeks that were very pale a few seconds before. He turned appealingly to Merriwell:

"You will agree not to blow, won't you, Mr. Merriwell?" he asked.

"Sure," replied Frank, cheerily. "You are welcome to all the fun you have had with me. Any time you want to haze me it isn't necessary to put on masks. Just send me a notification, and I will meet you anywhere. I'm one of the most accommodating fellows you ever saw."

"Three cheers for Merriwell!" shouted one of the throng, and the cheers were given.

That angered Bart Hodge more than anything else could have done.

"Oh, Merriwell knows how to work his cards!" he sneered. "He is playing it very smooth."

"You can't prove anything without his aid, for your word is no better than mine," said Burrage.

"Is that so? I rather think you have forgotten the other fellow who has suffered at your hands to-night."

"Dunnerwust?"

"Exactly. He will substantiate me."

"I don'd know vot dot vos," said Hans; "but I bets me ~~your~~ life I don'd do him

"They have imposed on you shamefully, Dunnerwust," said Hodge. "I want you to go with me to Professor Gunn and tell just what has happened, and state that Mr. Burrage here, whose mask I removed, was the leader."

Hans listened with his mouth open, a stolid look on his fantastically painted face.

"You want me to do dot, hey?" he said.

"Yes."

"Vell, I von't."

"What?"

"I don'd vas dot kindt uf a hairbin," declared the Dutch lad, much to the amazement of every one. "Dose vellers raised bardicular fits mit me, und I dink I lifes me through him all der same. Vot for I plow to der brofessor, ain'd id? Pime-by ven I geds to be a pig gun mit der rest uf der poys I vos goin' to have fun mit some odder blebe. You can subdanshiade all you vans to, put you don'd get Hans Dunnerwust to do some of dot mit you."

"Hurrah for Dunnerwust!" was the cry, and Hans was given a rousing ovation.

The boys had not counted on anything of this kind from the Dutch lad. Burrage had thought it possible he might frighten Hans into keeping still, in case he could induce Hodge to be silent.

The stand Hans took should have shamed Hodge, but it did not seem to affect him any further than to make him angry.

"You're a bigger fool than I thought you were!" he exclaimed, savagely. "I don't believe you know enough to come in when it rains!"

"Dot vos all righd. You vos velcome to think vot you

please, und I do der same mit you. Uf I vos a plamed fool, I don'd peen any shneak."

"Good stuff!" roared the boys. "We'll swear by you after this, Dutchey."

"You see, Hodge," said Burrage, "you will be alone in this matter if you report it. Neither Merriwell nor Dunnerwust will help you, and——"

"I'll tell what happened, and they will have to tell the truth or a lie, in case they are questioned."

What course of "persuasion" Burrage would have resorted to cannot be told, for at this moment there came the sound of hurrying feet outside, and a sharp, peculiar rap on the door.

"The danger signal!" cried the unmasked cadet, leaping to the door. "Out with the lights, fellows!"

The order was obeyed, and the interior of the boathouse was plunged into darkness.

Burrage flung open the door, hastily asking:

"What's up?"

"There's stirring in the academy," was the panted reply. "It is likely an inspection of rooms is going on."

"Then some of the profs. must have got wind of something," said Burrage. "We'll have to hustle in, fellows, and trust to luck to get into our beds without detection."

There was a general scurrying out of the boathouse, but Burrage waited quietly for Hodge. When Bart appeared, the exposed cadet tackled him again, telling the others to leave them.

Exactly what passed between Hodge and Burrage nobody but themselves could have told, but they reached the academy almost as soon as most of the others, and Burrage whispered to a companion that Bart would not blow first thing in the morning.

At the signal agreed upon, certain windows of the academy opened, and knotted ropes were let down to the boys, the most of whom showed a skill in climbing that betokened considerable experience.

Much to their relief, the boys found everything quiet about the academy, and, one by one, they climbed the ropes and stole away to their rooms.

Hans Dunnerwust was the last to make the attempt to get up the rope, and, after he had fallen back three times, it became necessary to have him tie it about his body under the arms, so the boys above could pull him up into the window.

"It must have been a false alarm," thought Frank, when he found himself safely in his room, with no sign of any one moving about the academy besides the cadets who had just slipped in.

He undressed quietly, and got into bed, Hodge doing the same. No words passed between them.

"Burrage surely is in a bad scrape," thought Merriwell, "for Hodge will try to strike a blow at Inza by having her brother disgraced. I would do anything for her, and I wish there were some way I could save the fellow."

But, although he lay awake thinking of the matter for a long time, he could not seem to devise any scheme for Burrage's rescue.

Yet Burrage was to be saved at the cost of more than one heart pang for Frank.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SURPRISE FOR FRANK.

It was generally conceded by the boys at the academy that Burrage was in "a mighty bad box," for it seemed certain that Hodge would report him to Old Gunn, in which case demerit and loss of chevrons must follow, if nothing of a more serious nature resulted.

Burrage had won his position at the school by hard, persistent work, and he was regarded generally as deserving of the stripes. He had taken an active interest in all kinds of sports and games, being captain of both the baseball team and the football team, and he would be missed severely if he were expelled.

"Hodge will never be able to stay in this academy if he drives Burrage out," said more than one.

There was a slight feeling of relief when the first forenoon passed after the events of the previous night at the boathouse, and Burrage was not called to account. Still the suspense continued, for no one could tell when the blow would fall.

Some of the cadets tried to get Hodge aside and "have a hack" at him, but he craftily avoided anything of the kind, seeming well satisfied with the attention he was receiving just then.

"These fellows are beginning to realize that I count at this school, that is plain," he chuckled to himself. "If I can get two or three more of the high and mighty ones under my thumb, it is possible they will not be so very lofty and overbearing."

Hodge was impatient to receive his uniform and be assigned.

"I do not think much of this herding four in a room," he declared, in the presence of his roommates. "I am not used to it, and it goes against my grain."

"Av ye'll spake to Oul' Gunn, it's loikely he'll give yez a room all by yersilf," said Barney Mulloy. "Av he does, ye'll nivver be missed at all, at all."

"You're altogether too free with your lip, Mulloy!" snapped the dark-eyed lad. "You should be a little more respectful when addressing your betters."

"Oi am, b'y; but you're not on th' list."

That was too much for Bart's fiery temper.

"You and Merriwell make a good pair!" he flashed. "He is just the sort of a fellow to bunk with a common Irishman."

Now Barney had a temper of his own, for all that he was usually jovial and light-hearted, and this was too much for him. He made a rush at Hodge, and there would have been trouble instantly had not both Frank and Ned intervened.

"Don't mind him," said Merriwell. "It is not likely we will all be in one room many days longer, and——"

"That's right," cut in Bart. "Nor will we be in one company. I have a lap on you fellows, for I have seen military schools before, and I am sure of being assigned to the first squad."

"Av yez are, Oi hope they'll put me in th' last," muttered Barney. "Oi want to be as fur from yez as Oi can."

Hodge was really confident that his knowledge of drill work would place him in the first squad, for all that the system at Fardale, being copied after that in vogue at

West Point, was much more rigid and difficult than anything he had previously encountered.

At many military schools in this country the strictly business system of instruction insisted on by soldiers is set aside for something of a showy nature, but something utterly useless except for the purpose of display.

Now it happened that Hodge's previous experience had been at such schools, and, instead of helping him on, as he expected, what he had already learned held him back, for he was forced to unlearn it and acquire something entirely different and at variance.

Repeatedly he declared the system at Fardale was entirely wrong, and it did not change his view in this respect at all to be assured that the entire manual was an accurate copying of the form at West Point. Such being the case, Bart declared that West Point must be old-fogyish and behind the times.

Oh, the infinitely superior wisdom of some fledglings!

For the new boys at Fardale Academy the first days were wretched and exasperating. It was a case of drill, drill, drill all the time, with scarcely any let-up. It seemed that the yearlings who had them in charge took fiendish delight in working them to the verge of endurance. They were forced to keep twisting, turning, bending and extending for hours, and in this way their muscles were sore and stiffened at first, and their very bones seemed to grow lame. Still those heartless yearlings kept them at it, rising on tiptoe, bending double, springing up, swaying forward, backward, and sideways, working, working, working, and never seeming to get any rest.

It did not take much of this to convince the boys that they had two or three thousand sore muscles in their body of which no mention could be found in physiology.

What did it amount to? Why, after a while the soreness began to wear off, and they found that they could go through the evolutions much easier and more swiftly. The awkward squad developed into youths worthy to receive uniforms.

The whole school seemed to breathe easier as time slipped away and Hodge still remained silent concerning his experiences at the boathouse. For two or three days while the suspense continued the plebes surely had a much easier time of it at the hands of their cadet instructors.

"Burrage must have fixed it up some way with Hodge," was the final decision. "Either that, or Hodge is not so bad a fellow as he seemed."

Both Burrage and Hodge kept silent about the matter, and it proved useless to question them.

By his roommates Hodge was seen smiling over a dainty letter he had received. The stationery was distinctly feminine, as was the writing upon the envelope, which the fellow took good care to display.

Merriwell avoided Hodge as much as possible. He had at last decided that Bart was a churl, and he did not wish to have anything to do with such a person. Knowing that he could not endure much of Hodge's insolence, he tried to give his foe little opportunity to be insulting.

All through his first week at the academy Frank had longed for Saturday to arrive, as he had been invited to call on Inza Burrage on the afternoon of that day. He anticipated a most pleasant call, well knowing how welcome he would be in the eyes of the girl's parents, who regarded the savior of their daughter from the fangs of a rabid dog as a young knight of modern times

The day came round at last, and Frank dressed himself in his best, taking the greatest pains to note that his linen was immaculate, his cravat tastily tied, his clothes brushed, his shoes polished, and his soft hat crushed with a careless air. He spent a long time before the mirror.

Hodge left the academy nearly an hour before Frank, and he was also dressed in his best, although his taste ran to the flashy, and he did not display anything like Merriwell's good taste.

Having passed outside of the beautiful grounds that surrounded the academy buildings, Frank stepped off briskly toward Fardale, whistling a cheery tune. It was a bright, sunshiny afternoon, and he was in high spirits. At times he could not restrain the boyish inclination to hop and skip, like a gamboling lamb, but he made sure he was out of sight of the academy before indulging in any such antics.

Reaching the quiet little village, he walked along the tree-shaded streets till he came to Inza Burrage's home. A handsome carriage and a spirited, well-groomed horse stood in front of the house. A boy was holding the horse.

Barely giving this turn-out a glance, Frank ran up the steps and rang the bell.

After a brief delay, a maid appeared at the door.

"Is Miss Burrage at home?" asked Frank.

"She is," was the reply.

"Please give her my card."

He placed a neat card in the maid's fingers, at the same time stepping into the hall. To his surprise, he was requested to wait there.

"Well, this is an odd reception," he thought, as he stood stiffly in the hall, awaiting the return of the maid.

The young woman was not gone long. In a very brief space of time she returned, and said:

"Miss Inza begs to be excused to-day. She has callers at present, and cannot see you."

"Cannot see me?" repeated Frank, rather dazed.

"No, sir."

He seemed stunned as he turned away. Nothing in the world could have been more unexpected than this. She had invited him to call, and now she declined to see him. What did it mean?

He stepped out of the door and heard it close behind him. For a moment he stood irresolutely on the step, beginning to believe it was all a mistake. She had not refused to see him—it was not possible. For a moment he was tempted to ring the bell again and demand to receive further assurance that Miss Burrage would not see him; then he realized what a breach of propriety that would be, and he slowly descended the steps. As he did so, he fancied he heard some one laugh within the parlor.

That laugh sounded as if it came from the lips of Bartley Hodge!

CHAPTER XXII.

CUT!

The boy who was holding the horse grinned as Frank reached the sidewalk and turned away. The urchin seemed to suspect or know the truth.

"Refused to see me!" muttered Frank, as he turned away, without casting a look back. "Who would have thought such a thing possible! But it is like a girl!" he added, bitterly. "They are all changeable and fickle!"

Had he glanced back he would have been further humiliated by seeing Bartley Hodge smiling triumphantly at him from one of the parlor windows.

For some time he walked along like one dazed, paying little heed to his surroundings. Finally he aroused himself with a start, gave himself a shake, and said:

"I'll be hanged if I will make a fool of myself over any girl! I will show Miss Burrage that I am not all broken up."

Feeling the necessity of action, exercise, something to stir him up and make him forget what had just taken place, he inquired the way to the nearest liverystable, where he asked for the best saddle horse to be obtained.

"I want one with plenty of life and spirit," he said.

"There's one with plenty of life and spirit," said the hostler, indicating a handsome black gelding in a box stall; "but you can't ride him."

"Why not?"

"Can't handle him."

That touched Frank, for he was a most expert horseman, and he had broken more than one vicious animal.

"I want that horse."

"Why, you are crazy!" cried the hostler. "There is but one man in Fardale who can ride him."

"If there is one, that is quite enough. Can you put the saddle on him, or shall I?"

"I can saddle him, but I won't let a young fellow like you have him. I'm not going to murder you!"

"Where is the proprietor?"

"What do you want?"

"I want that horse, and I am going to have him, if money will hire him."

The proprietor happened to be in the office, and, hearing these words, he came out. When he looked Frank over, he shook his head, saying:

"I don't dare let you have that horse, young man. He will throw you as fast as you can get into the saddle."

"If he throws me once, I'll agree not to make another attempt to ride him, and I will pay you ten dollars for the privilege of getting into the saddle. Here is the money, which I will deposit with you now, with the understanding that it is yours if he throws me once, and you are to take the regular pay for the use of him in case I succeed in riding him."

The man looked at the bright new ten-dollar bill and hesitated. Finally he took the money, and said:

"All right, young fellow, you may try your luck; but I have warned you, and I will not be held responsible. I hope he will not kill you when he throws you."

At first glance Frank had seen that the horse was not a vicious beast. The animal had not been broken prop-

erly, and, having thrown almost every one who had attempted to ride him, he felt it his duty to keep it up.

Had the creature been vicious, he would not have permitted the hostler to strap on the saddle with scarcely any trouble.

Frank was not dressed for riding, but in his present state of mind, he did not mind that. He wanted something to take up his mind and make him forget what had just happened, and he was eager for the struggle with the horse.

When the saddle was properly adjusted and everything was ready, Frank procured a riding whip and prepared to mount. The horse turned its head, and watched him suspiciously out of the corner of its eye.

"I'll try to hold him till you get into the saddle," said the hostler, keeping at the bit.

Frank smiled, for he saw the man was frightened.

"You needn't bother to hold him," he said. "Give me the bit, and stand aside."

He took the horse by the bit, but did not waste a moment in attempting to soothe or fondle the creature. The hostler and the proprietor were astounded to see him give the bit a wrench that sat the animal back on its haunches, and then, before the beast could recover, he was on its back. When the horse lunged to its feet Frank Merriwell was sitting securely in the saddle.

With a wild squeal, the animal shot like a rocket out of the stable.

A number of the villagers had gathered about to see the fun. Some were grinning in expectation, and some were saying it was a shame to let the boy risk his life in such a manner, while yet others declared Frank a fool and rather hoped he would be seriously injured.

At two leaps the black gelding cleared the stable and reached the center of the road, where he stopped with his forward feet braced and his back humped, his head going down. Everybody expected to see the boy shoot out of the saddle and fly headlong to the ground, but nothing of the kind occurred. As if glued to the horse, Frank remained securely in the saddle.

Probably nobody was more astonished than was the horse. The creature had expected to unseat Frank at the first effort, but, instead of that, it felt itself soundly cut by the whip, while the strange youth still remained securely and firmly on its back.

Again a wild squeal came from the horse, and then the staring villagers saw a battle royal between the boy and the beast, for the creature did everything possible to unseat Frank without lying down and rolling over, but the boy would not be shaken, and the whip continued to score the glossy hide of the obstinate animal.

It took several minutes of this to convince the horse that it had met its master, and then, of a sudden, the creature gave in.

The crowd cheered admiringly as the boy rode away in triumph, now speaking soothingly to the excited horse, and stroking its neck.

This battle had sent Frank's blood leaping in his veins, and, for the time, he entirely forgot Inza Burrage and her refusal to see him.

Not for long, however.

He had finally gotten the splendid horse fully under control and quieted down when he observed coming toward him the very horse he had seen the boy holding in front of Inza's house.

In the carriage sat Inza herself, with Bartley Hodge triumphantly driving at her side.

Frank paled, and the hot blood poured to his cheeks. A feeling of bitter anger and resentment swept over him.

So this was why she had refused to see him! She had forgotten the past, and once more accepted Bart Hodge in preference to him! Had there been a side street near, he would have wheeled into it, and thus escaped meeting him, but there was nothing of the sort, and he could not make up his mind to turn squarely about before their very faces.

"I'll have to face it out!" he grated, through his teeth.

Now, Frank Merriwell was too much the gentleman to openly show resentment, so, when the carriage came near, he lifted his hat with all the grace and courtesy he could command.

Inza Burrage gave him a flitting glance, her face quite pale, and coldly turned away.

She had publicly cut him!

Bart Hodge grinned sneeringly, and the carriage rolled past.

All the angry color fled from Frank Merriwell's cheeks, and he turned pale once more. This was almost more than he could endure, and it was by exercising the utmost of his self-control that he held himself in check at that moment.

What followed during the next hour afterward seemed something like a dream to him. He remembered that he lashed the horse unmercifully, and rode at a mad gallop somewhere, anywhere. His brain seemed in a tumult and, for the first time in his life, he felt that he had an enemy whom he would rejoice to strangle. Had he met Bart Hodge alone in the open country while in this

mood, a serious encounter must have taken place between them.

At length the cool breeze fanned his cheeks till he became calmer, and he turned back along a new road that led toward the village.

He felt that he desired never to see Inza Burrage again. He could feel nothing but scorn and contempt for a girl who would thus treat one who had saved her life at the risk of his own.

And he made up his mind that he would strangle Hodge if the fellow ever spoke of the matter in his presence. Growing calmer and calmer, he rode on till the village was close at hand.

Far away along the railroad he heard the whistle of the afternoon express, which did not stop at Fardale, but went whizzing through at top speed. The train was in sight when he was startled to hear a faint clatter of hoofs, the rattle of wheels, and a feminine scream of terror.

The voice was that of a girl he knew very well—Inza Burrage!

CHAPTER XXIII.

SAVED!

Parallel with the road along which Frank Merriwell was riding ran another road, and, just as the railroad was reached, the two roads united like the upper forks of a great Y, only they came together with a sweep, like the bottom of the letter U.

Down this other road a runaway horse was plunging, dragging a rocking, swaying carriage, in which were clinging two persons.

It was the team Bart Hodge had hired at the village livery stable, and the occupants of the carriage were Bart Hodge and Inza Burrage.

The horse had become frightened and unmanageable, and Hodge had lost his head and lost control of the animal, which was carrying him and his companion straight toward the railroad crossing.

Frank saw all this at a glance, and he saw that a terrible catastrophe seemed almost sure to take place. One swift look had told him that the runaway would reach the crossing at nearly the same instant the engine of the express went whizzing along.

"They will be killed!" gasped the boy on the black gelding.

And then, in the twinkling of an eye, he flew to action.

With his whip he cut the horse he bestrode, and sent the creature straight at the fence at one side of the road.

The spirited horse rode beautifully to the structure,

clearing it in a manner that would have filled Frank with admiration under other circumstances.

Across the narrow field that separated the two forks of the road he cut at an angle that was intended to intercept the runaway.

Bart Hodge saw the terrible peril that menaced himself and his fair companion, and he sawed madly at the reins, but without avail, as the runaway had the bit in its teeth and would not be stopped.

The engineer of the express, from a distance, saw the runaway, and the engine whistle sent out a frantic signal of "down breaks."

"They can't stop!" muttered the lad on the horse. "It is impossible!"

Cut! cut! cut! went the whip, and the handsome horse fairly flew across the field.

Frank's heart was in his mouth.

"How can I save them? How can I save them?" he kept asking himself. "The runaway horse will be too near the crossing for me to stop him. How can I save them?"

And then he witnessed an act that made his blood boil with indignation.

Finding he could not stop the horse, and seeing the animal was almost certain to reach the crossing just in time to be hurled to death, Bart Hodge rose in the wagon and jumped out, striking on his feet, but whirling over and over into the ditch.

"Served him right if it broke his neck, the coward!" grated Frank.

He did not give Hodge a second glance, but, selecting a low piece of fence, he gave his entire attention to the object of reaching the road ahead of the runaway.

Toot! toot! toot! shrieked the engine of the express.

Once more the horse Frank bestrode rose handsomely to the fence. Over it he went, without touching anywhere.

Frank had seen Inza gazing at him appealingly, her face ashen with terror, and, as the horse made the leap, he shouted:

"Obey me, and I will save you!"

He could not be sure she understood, but he sincerely hoped so, for he felt that her life depended on her understanding and having nerve and strength to obey his command.

He reached the road a bit in front of the runaway, and promptly reined his horse toward the crossing. Then, looking over his shoulder, he held the animal in check sufficiently for the runaway to drag the swaying carriage alongside.

"Ready, Miss Burrage!" rang out Frank's voice, clear and strong, for all that the engine of the express seemed right upon them. "Now—rise up—jump!"

She heard him—she obeyed! His arms were outstretched, and it was not very far from the carriage to their clasp. She jumped, and fate was very kind to her just then, for she landed fairly in his clasp, and he held her there, without being unseated, a thing he could not have done had he not been a perfect horseman.

Clinging fast to his precious burden with one arm, Frank swiftly caught at the rein with his free hand. By chance more than by good judgment, he caught the proper side to draw the horse from the point of danger, and the creature bearing the double burden swept round the bend of the great U, without attempting to cross the track.

Not so the runaway. Straight upon the track plunged the mad horse. There was a crash that was heard above the sound of the wheels, which were grinding and sliding along the sanded rails, and the unfortunate runaway was hurled to its death, while the carriage was shivered to hundreds of pieces.

But Inza Burrage was saved! Saved by the brave lad she had cut and ignored a short time before.

A second time she owed her life to Frank Merriwell.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HONORS FOR THE HERO.

It is not strange that, after the passing of the first great wave of thankfulness, Frank Merriwell should thrill with triumph and exultation.

What a grand revenge was his! He had been humiliated that day before Bart Hodge, but he felt that he was more than even now.

He looked down at the pale face of the beautiful girl, and he saw her great dark eyes were fixed steadily on him, and in their depth was a look that bespoke unbounded thankfulness and admiration.

"You are safe, Miss Burrage," he said, when he saw that she had not fainted. "There is no longer any danger."

"The horse——"

"Was killed by the express."

She shuddered.

"And I should have been killed if I had remained in the carriage! I should have been killed but for you, for I did not have strength to jump out. I did not have strength to do anything but cling to the seat till I heard your voice, so clear and confident and commanding. That gave me strength, and I did as you bade me."

"Which was indeed fortunate, as I could not have saved you otherwise—I could not reach you. It was impossible to check that mad horse."

"And you did not hesitate to do all this for me after——"

He knew what she meant, and his face hardened a bit, telling that a wound was still open in his heart.

"It was my duty. I would have tried to do as much for my worst enemy."

A shadow came to her pretty face.

"Then it was not for me in particular that you ventured so much. I had no right to expect it, but you will understand soon. I can never see that Bartley Hodge again—never! I hope he was not hurt, but, after this, I will not be forced into anything against my will."

Frank caught eagerly at her words.

"Forced?" he repeated. "What do you mean by that? Were you forced into anything? Were you compelled to accept the attentions of Hodge and cut me? It cannot be your parents——"

"My parents had nothing to do with it. You know my brother got into a bad scrape at the academy—Hodge could have caused his expulsion. Walter knew Hodge fancied me a little, and he besought me to save him. I wrote Hodge a letter, entreating him to spare my brother, and he agreed, but I was forced to make very bitter terms with him, as he demanded that I decline to see you again and cut you in public. I—I love my brother——"

Frank saw she was breaking down, and he cut in swiftly:

"Say no more, Miss Burrage; I understand it all, and I cannot blame you."

"You forgive me?"

"I do, Miss Burrage."

"Call me Inza, please."

"Inza!"

The way he spoke the name carried the blood to her cheeks and temples, and it was by a mighty effort of will

that the boy crushed back a great desire to kiss her then and there, regardless of the many eyes he knew must be watching them.

She must have read this fact in his eyes, for she half-whispered:

"I will be at home when you call next time—Frank!"

His arms were still about her, and he held her close to his beating heart. Between them there was now a perfect understanding.

And now, suddenly returning to a full realization of their surroundings, he held her securely with one arm, while he reined the gallant horse with the other hand, whirling squarely about in the road, and returning toward the railway.

The express had come to a full stop, but, finding nothing more serious than the killing of the runaway horse and the smashing of the carriage had taken place, it was already starting onward again.

A crowd of people was swiftly collecting about the remains of the horse and carriage, and men and women were running toward the scene of the catastrophe from all directions.

It is astonishing how swiftly, even in a small country village, a crowd will collect when anything like a fire or a serious accident takes place.

Some of the people were hurrying along the road toward the boy on the horse and the rescued girl. A man in a carriage was driving toward them, and, as she saw them, Inza said:

"It is Dr. Haskell. He must have seen the accident."

This was true. Dr. Haskell drove up, crying:

"Young man, you shall have a medal of honor for saving life! That was the bravest and noblest act I

ever saw in all my life! It was astonishing—wonderful—amazing! Give me that girl—put her right into this carriage. I will take her home! It was wonderful—astonishing—amazing!” he repeated, with excitement and admiration.

Frank was not a little reluctant to let Inza leave his arms, but he saw that it was best, and so, riding close to the doctor's carriage, he handed her over to his ardent admirer.

As the doctor assisted her to a seat by his side, he said: “This young gentleman saved you from being instantly killed, Miss Inza.”

“And he is the one who saved me from being bitten by the mad dog,” she explained.

“Is that so?” shouted the delighted and admiring doctor. “Then he ought to have two medals—by thunder, he had! An account of both deeds shall be sent to Congress, and we will see if they will not award him a medal. Yes, we will!”

Frank was blushing like a schoolgirl, and he could not say a word.

“Give me your hand, my lad!” continued the effusive physician. “I am proud to shake hands with the bravest boy I ever saw!”

Dr. Haskell nearly wrung Frank's hand off in his excitement.

The crowd was beginning to gather around them, and, feeling confused and abashed, Merriwell said:

“I think I will take this horse to the stable, doctor. Good-by for the present, Miss Burrage.”

She bade him remember his promise to call; and then he touched the horse with his whip and cantered away.

The crowd near the crossing where the accident took

place saw him coming, and they stared at him till he was near at hand, and then a big man with a big voice shouted:

"Three cheers for him! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" roared the crowd.

Frank bowed his acknowledgment, still blushing furiously, and rode onward.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON TOP.

In the meantime, Bart Hodge had picked himself up from the ditch into which he had rolled after his cowardly act in leaping from the carriage and leaving his companion to her fate. Although he had received some severe bruises and abrasions, not a bone had been broken.

"Oh, Lord! what have I done?" he gasped, as he stood staring after the runaway, expecting to see Inza carried to her death. "Why didn't I grab her and take her along when I jumped!"

Then he saw Frank Merriwell, saw the black horse and gallant rider sail over the fence, saw them reach the side of the carriage, and witnessed the rescue.

It is but fair to say that Bart was madly eager for Frank to save the girl, for he knew how much scorn and blame would fall on him if she were killed by the express, and, besides that, he was not vile enough to have little care whether Inza was killed or not, so long as he was safe.

For all of various reprehensible traits of his nature, Bartley Hodge was not irredeemably bad by any means. He was passionate and vengeful, and, in times of peril, he was likely to lose his head and do the wrong thing, as he had done in this case. But, now that it was done and there was no way of undoing it, Bart would have given anything in his power had he remained in the carriage and either saved Inza or met death with her.

"What will they think of me?" he muttered, bitterly.

"What will people say? They will call me a coward, and they will pronounce Merriwell a hero! What made me jump without her! Oh, I was a fool, and I hate myself for it!"

He saw the express come to a stop, and saw the crowd collecting.

"I can never face them," he muttered, as he slipped the fence and skulked away. "I must keep out of sight."

He did not go to the livery stable where he had hired the team.

"I will just drop him a note, and say the governor'll pay for the turn-out," he decided. "Oh, but won't the old man cut up when he hears what has happened!"

And so, keeping out of sight as much as possible, he made his way back to the academy, where Frank found him in his room some time later.

Hodge expected that Merriwell would show his triumph, but, to his surprise, the boy whom the whole town of Fardale was praising as a noble hero made no outward show of exultation or triumph.

"Jingoes!" thought Hodge. "He's got a queer way of rubbing it in, but it hurts just the same. I rather wish he would be a little different. He doesn't act as if he considers me worth his scorn."

But Bart was to suffer enough when the story was generally known at the academy, which happened before nightfall. He found himself scorned and held in contempt, while Merriwell was honored and regarded as a hero.

Bart's sensitive soul was almost crushed by this; but he quickly started a story that he had not jumped from the carriage, but had been thrown out by its swayings as

he was rising to get a better hold on the reins. This he insisted was the truth.

Immediately Merriwell was questioned on this point. When asked if Bart's statement was true, he said:

"I do not know. It may be, and I hope it is, for I do not wish to think any fellow would desert a girl under similar circumstances."

But Bart felt the disgrace so keenly that, when writing his father to send a check in payment for the destroyed team, he asked to be taken out of Fardale Academy.

In reply Mr. Hodge promptly sent the check, made out payable to the order of the proprietor of the livery stable, and assured his son that he must remain in Fardale, finishing by repeating his threat to set him adrift to "hoe his own row" in case he should be expelled.

There was nothing for it but to stay, and so Hodge resolved to brace up and "face the music" as best he could. If his father was determined to keep him at Fardale, he would make the "old man" furnish plenty of cash, and by a liberal expenditure of dollars he hoped to purchase popularity.

It had been his ambition to be among the first to be assigned to the first squad to receive uniforms, but in this he was disappointed, and he bit his tongue with anger when he heard Merriwell's name read on the list.

"That fellow is on top now," he muttered, "but there is another time coming. Things will change."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FRANK RECEIVES THE MEDAL.

An extraordinary scene was taking place on the parade ground of Fardale Military Academy.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the cadets had been in camp a full week. On the plain to the west of the parade ground the white tents were pitched in four rows, making three streets within the camp. These streets were known as A, B, and C, and the tents occupied by the new scholars, or "plebes," were in the last row, facing on C street.

Just now the camp seemed entirely deserted.

There was a large number of visitors on the plain, as well as a great throng of cadets, all mingling freely and gathered round a common center, where Professor Zenas Gunn was making a speech.

Evidently the cadets had been indulging in various sports, which had been interrupted by the professor, who had called them together for some purpose known to himself and a few chosen ones who were gathered around him, among whom were the assistant professors, Scotch and Jenks.

Professor Scotch's full name was Horace Orman Tyler Scotch, and, quick to seize upon anything of the sort, with the aid of the first three initials, the cadets had nicknamed him "Hot" Scotch. He was a small man, with very fiery hair and whiskers, which, together with a peppery temper, made the name seem very applicable.

Professor Jenks was more than six feet tall, and very

slim. His front name was Hyson, and so it naturally came about that he was known among the cadets as "High Jinks."

Between Professor Scotch and Professor Jenks on the platform was seated Frank Merriwell, whose face wore a flushed, bewildered, expectant expression.

Like his "plebe" companions and the members of the upper classes gathered around, he was utterly at a loss to understand what Professor Gunn was up to, and he felt his cheeks burning hotly, much to his discomfiture. All he knew was that he had been captured and marched to this spit, where he was placed between the two under-professors, like a desperate criminal between officers of the law.

When the cadet band had played a lively air to draw the crowd around, Professor Gunn began his speech. All listened with curiosity expressed on their faces.

The professor was given to great verbosity, and it was some time before any one could get the drift of his remarks. He made a long preamble, having a great deal to say about the academy and its rules, which was entirely foreign to the subject to which he was leading, or, rather, trying to approach. At length, however, he began to speak in a complimentary manner of the young gentlemen cadets, and more than one suspected he had something pleasant in store for Merriwell. Finally he described the heroism of a new member at the school, speaking in glowing terms of his noble daring in fighting the mad dog, and in saving Miss Burrage from death beneath the engine of the express.

"A full and concise account of these grand and thrilling acts of bravery, made out by Lawyer Howe, of Fardale, signed by myself and my assistants, properly

witnessed and sworn to, was sent to the Congress of the United States," continued Professor Gunn. "And now the young gentleman who thus twice saved Miss Burrage from death, and whom I am proud to own as a cadet at this academy, is about to be rewarded as he properly deserved. With no unnecessary delay, Congress ordered a medal of honor struck off for Frank Harrison Merriwell, and I have called you together for the purpose of presenting it publicly to the one for whom it was designed. Mr. Merriwell, stand up, sir!"

Frank rose to his feet, feeling that he sincerely wished himself in China, or any place but where he was at that moment. A great shout of applause went up from the crowd, and he feared the blood would come bursting through his cheeks. His head swam, and there seemed to be a haze over the faces upturned to him—a haze that parted at one point, and showed him one face that gave him nerve and courage.

It was that of the girl he had twice saved—Inza Burrage. She was gazing at him proudly, admiringly, and she smiled her encouragement.

"My boy," said Professor Gunn, speaking as he had never before been known to address a member of the academy, with something like a touch of genuine affection, "it gives me unbounded satisfaction and pleasure to be the one to present this beautiful medal. I will place it here on your breast, over a heart that is brave and noble, and may the sight of it always serve as an inspiration to you, and while it reminds you of the past, I trust it will, by reviving and keeping fresh such a memory, lead you to still grander things in the future. Again I say I am proud of you, and I am proud to number you among the young gentlemen students of this

academy. I trust that your noble example will be of lasting influence and value to those with whom you are associated. That's all."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank.

Then the band struck up a lively air, the crowd cheered, and a swarm of Frank's admirers lifted him on their shoulders and carried him away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AMBUSHED AND ROBBED.

"Did you ever hear such rot as Old Gunn's spouting!" exclaimed Leslie Gage, one of the old students at the academy. "All this fuss over a plebe who has happened to do a little something that any one else might have done in his place, makes me sick!"

"How about Hodge?" smiled Cadet Lieutenant Swift, who happened to be with Gage. "He failed to improve his opportunity."

"Hodge was unlucky," said Gage. "He says he was thrown from the rocking carriage while trying to stop the runaway horse, and I believe he tells the truth. He is a generous fellow—spends his money like water."

"And I fancy his generosity has a great deal to do with your opinion as to the truth of his statement," declared Swift.

"I hope you do not mean that you think I could be bought?"

"Oh, no, I don't mean a thing—not a thing."

But the way Swift spoke the words made it all the more apparent that he did mean something, and sarcasm was evident in his face, as well as his voice.

"There's Hodge now," said Gage, as the dark-haired plebe and his friend Bascomb passed along, talking earnestly in low tones. "I want a word with him."

He hurried away after the two.

Watching, Swift saw them draw aside from the

throng, and talk earnestly, with their heads close together.

"I believe they are plotting mischief," he muttered. "Hodge is revengeful, Bascomb is a bully, and Gage is envious of Merriwell. There is something being hatched up, and Merriwell had better watch out."

He decided to speak to the lad who had been honored in such a remarkable manner that day, and so he set out to find Frank, who had been carried away on the shoulders of his admiring friends.

It was nearly thirty minutes later when he saw Merriwell walking along one of the tree-lined avenues of the grounds, with Inza Burrage by his side.

Swift hesitated, then decided to speak to Frank later, and the two passed on, happy in each other's company, the medal of honor shining on the lad's breast.

That evening Frank Merriwell walked through the twilight to Fardale village with Inza Burrage. It had been a happy day for both of them.

It had grown quite dark when Frank turned back toward the academy, and he swung along at a good pace, whistling a merry tune, his heart light and care-free.

He had no warning when, of a sudden, dark forms darted out of the bushes by the roadside and surrounded him. He was clutched by strong hands, and a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform, was pressed over his mouth and nose.

By a desperate effort, he freed his mouth and gave a shout.

"Help!"

The shout was answered, and the sound of feet running swiftly along the road was heard.

Exclamations of dismay and anger broke from Frank's assailants.

"We'll have to skip, fellows!" hissed one.

"Skip it is," said another.

Then Frank was hurled heavily to the ground, and the dark figures melted away into the bushes.

A solitary individual came dashing up the road to the spot, as Frank sat up in a dazed way, rubbing his head, and staring around in the darkness.

"Pwhat's th' matter wid yez?" asked the newcomer.

Frank recognized the voice.

"Hello, Barney!" he exclaimed. "It was lucky you were near enough to hear me when I shouted."

"Be me sowl!" cried Barney Mulloy; "it's Frankie, b'y! Pwhat's the manin' av this, Merriwell, darlint?"

"It means I was waylaid—ambushed—assaulted! There were five or six of them, and they had cloths or handkerchiefs tied over their faces. They jumped out of the bushes here, as I was passing."

"Ye don't mane it!"

"They froze to me," continued Frank—"tried to chloroform me! Here—by jingoes! here is the very handkerchief they tried to do the job with! Have a whiff of that."

Barney took it and smelled of it.

"Phew!" he puffed. "It smells loike it wur shpoilt."

"There's something behind this business," declared Frank, as he got upon his feet, assisted by the Irish lad. "I don't understand what those fellows were up to. How did you happen to be along here anyway, Barney?"

"It wur Lieutenant Swift thot towld me ye moight get in trouble, an' so Oi came out to mate yez."

"Lieutenant Swift told you that?"

"Yis."

"What made him tell you anything of the kind?"

"Begobs! Oi dunno at all, at all. He said he didn't have a chance to spake to yez, an' he advised me to tell yez to look out moighty sharrup fer yersilf."

"Then he must have known something was going to happen; but I don't know why he should have sent me warning, for he is very reserved, and he will have very little to do with plebes. He has never seemed friendly toward me."

"Oi dunno about thot; but pwhat he said made me fale onasy, an' so Oi came out to mate yez on yer way back to camp."

"I am very glad you did, Barney. Let me have that handkerchief. It may serve me a turn."

"Av ye can foind out who owns th' rag, ye can make it moighty warrum fer th' spalpane."

"That's right," nodded Frank. "But I would give more to know just why I was attacked in such a manner. There is a mystery about it that I do not understand."

"No more do Oi."

Frank took the chloroform-saturated handkerchief and placed it in his pocket. He was still a trifle giddy, and his legs felt strangely weak, but the fresh air was swiftly relieving him, and he soon became able to walk along briskly at Barney's side.

In a short time they came out where they could look down upon the cadet encampment, with the lights showing through the white tents, and the sentries pacing up and down on their beats, being plainly revealed now and then, as they passed some illumined tent that was thrown open at both ends.

It was a pleasant spectacle, and the two boys paused to view it admiringly.

"Av it warn't fer th' shtudy, Oi'd loike to go to shkool th' rist av me loife," said Barney.

"You would get tired of it in time," asserted Frank. "As for me, if it wasn't for the studying, I wouldn't go to school at all. I want to travel all over the world, and I mean to do so some day."

They went down and entered the grounds, passing the first sentry. When the camp was reached, they were brought to a halt by sentry number two, but they gave the countersign without hesitation, and were permitted to pass on.

It was a warm evening, and the cadets were keeping to the open air. Merriwell was greeted from all sides, but he declined to join any of the groups, going straight to his tent, where he found Bartley Hodge and Hans Dunnerwust. Hodge regarded Frank closely as he entered, but said nothing.

Not so Hans.

"How you vos, ain'd id?" saluted the roly-poly Dutch lad. "You peen oudt to take a valk mit your girl alretty yet, I pet you your life. Yaw! Say, dot girl vos a peut. Uf I don'd peen engaged mit Katrina since I vos fife year oldt, I vould valk in undt cut you oudt mit dot girl. Put I don'd vant to ged Katrina my hair into. She vas fifteen year oldt, and veighs a hundret and sefenty-fife bounds. Shimminy Gristmas! dot girl haf a muscle pigger as mine headt. You pet me my boots she vouldn't do a thing to me uf she vos caught me pracin' ub to some odder girl!"

Hans winked with the whole side of his face as he made this final remark.

"G'wan wid yez, Dutch!" cut in Barney Mulloy. "Ye talk too much wid yer mouth, thot's pwhat yez do."

"Hey!" cried Hans, instantly assuming a belligerent mood. "Vot vos dot? Uf I don'd learn to dalk der United Sdates petter as you did, I pet me your shirt I wouldn'd oben my yaw! You dalk same as you hat your mouth full of pog-vater, doan'd id!"

"An' yez talk loike ye had yer mouth full av sour-croot, Dutch."

"Don'd you peen afther callin' me Dootch, Irish!"

"Oi'll brake yer oie av yez call me Oirish!"

There seemed danger of a scrap then and there, but Frank intervened, ordering them both to keep still, and, after some grumbling, they subsided.

But Hans could not keep still long, and he soon broke out:

"You vos a lucky chap, Frankie, when you peen got dot medal mit der United States of Congress py, ain'd id. Vot you done mit dot? I vant to look at him, ut you don'd haf some objection."

Frank glanced down at his breast, where the medal had been pinned, and then he staggered back, gasping:

"It's gone!"

"Gone?" gasped Barney Mulloy.

"Yes," said Frank, hoarsely; "it is gone, and I believe I have been robbed!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TELLTALE HANDKERCHIEF.

"Robbed?"

"Yes!"

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans.

Bart Hodge said not a word, but there was a strange look on his face.

"Perhaps ye've not been robbed, Merriwell, me b'y," said Barney, with an effort to reassure his friend.

"Then what has become of the medal?"

"Perhaps it wur lost in th' shkuffle."

"That is true," came eagerly from Frank. "It may have been torn from my breast accidentally. I must go back and see. There is plenty of time before taps."

"An' Oi'll go wid yez."

"Me, too, py shimminy!"

"We will take a candle and some matches," said Frank, who was greatly excited and distressed. "If it is anywhere near the spot where those fellows jumped on me, we can find it."

In a very few moments they had started, and as they left the tent Bart Hodge smiled grimly, whispering to himself:

"Search as much as you like, Frank Merriwell; but I don't believe you will find your medal this night."

The trio had no trouble in getting out of the camp and beyond the grounds, although Frank did not care to let it become known he had lost the precious medal pre-

sented to him that day. He felt that such an acknowledgment would be most disgraceful.

What would be thought of a boy careless enough to lose such a precious souvenir within a few hours after he received it? Would he not be regarded with scorn and contempt?

His face burned, and his heart was throbbing with pent-up shame and rage. Over and over he declared to himself that, if he had been robbed, his assailants should be brought to book and made to suffer for their dastardly act.

Frank led the way up the road toward Fardale village, with Barney close at his heels, and Hans puffing along behind. They soon reached the locality where the mysterious assault had taken place.

"Now to find the exact spot where they jumped on me," said Frank, as he and Barney began looking about.

Hans asked twenty questions between his panting breaths, and Frank told him enough to keep him still.

The spot was soon found. Frank's hands shook as he tried to light the candle, and he dropped two matches and burned his fingers with the third before he succeeded.

He was hoping against hope that the precious medal would be found somewhere on the ground near that spot.

Breathlessly the three lads began the search, and they kept it up till all were satisfied that it was a vain quest.

"It is not here!" said Frank, hoarsely.

The candle trembled in his hand, and his face showed ghastly pale by the quivering, flaring light.

"Thot's a fact," admitted Barney Mulloy, with great reluctance. "Av it wur here, we'd foind it aisy."

"There is no doubt, now, I was robbed!"

"Oi think ye're roight, me b'y."

"That was the main object of the assault upon me, and the sneaking gang succeeded!"

"Yis, me b'y."

"But they shall be made to suffer for it!" cried Frank, rising to his feet and holding one clenched hand above his head, while the light of the candle flared over three faces.

"If such a thing is possible, I will find out who did this dirty trick, and then——"

He stopped there, but the blank was more expressive than words could have been.

"You vant to gif dot feller der rink uf der blinkety-blink, as dose gadgets say ven der vos goin' to haze somepody," put in Hans. "Undt you vos der poy to do him."

Frank was reluctant to give over the search, and he got down on his knees again, going carefully over the ground, but with the same result.

A short time later the trio returned to the camp.

Bart Hodge was still in the tent. He gave Merriwell a quick glance, and then kept his eyes turned away.

Frank knew Hodge was still his enemy, for all that they were tent-mates, and something about the fellow's manner made him suspicious. He watched Bart a moment in silence, and then he sat down to think it over. Of course he must report the loss of the medal, but he wanted a few moments to get his nerves steady.

Hans could not be kept still.

"Uf you don'd lick der stuffin' uf dot veller oudt when you findt him, I vould do dot meinself," he declared. "He vos a shneak, dot's vot's der madder mit Hannah!"

Of a sudden, to Frank's surprise, Bart turned swiftly on him, saying:

"You didn't find the medal, did you, Merriwell?"

"No."

"You may be able to find it in the morning."

"If I do, I think I shall find it in the possession of an enemy."

"You believe you were robbed?"

"I do."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Report it to Lieutenant Gordan and Professor Gunn."

Now it happened that Lieutenant Gordan was passing the tent at this moment, and he heard Merriwell's words. Into the tent he stepped, saying:

"I am here, Mr. Merriwell, if you have anything to report."

In a moment the four lads sprang up, saluted, and stood at attention.

Frank hesitated, his face getting crimson again. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but he must confess that he had lost the medal, and so, after some stammering, he related his story.

The lieutenant listened silently, his face growing hard and stern. When Frank had finished, he asked:

"Have you any reason to suspect your assailants were cadets of Fardale Academy, Mr. Merriwell?"

"I suspect they were, for I know of no reason why any one else should waylay and rob me."

"But do you know of any reason why your fellow-students should commit such a reprehensible act?"

"No, sir; no good reason."

"Have you enemies among them?"

"I think so, sir."

"More than one?"

"Not more than one that I know as an enemy, sir."

Bart Hodge's face had paled a bit, but now it grew dark with anger, and he flashed Merriwell a fierce look.

"Then you have one whom you know as an enemy?"

"Yes, sir; he has shown himself my enemy in the past."

"Will you name him?"

"I beg you to excuse me, sir; I cannot."

"But it may aid a great deal in the recovery of your medal."

"It might, sir; and it might bring suspicion on one who is entirely innocent. I cannot name him, sir."

Bart's face cleared, and, for the first time in his life, he felt like shaking Frank's hand.

Lieutenant Gordan did not show approval, but, to tell the truth, he had not expected Merriwell would name any one as a known enemy.

"Very well," he said, "I will report the matter to Professor Gunn, and we will see what can be done. If we find out the guilty party or parties belong to this school, I promise you they shall be expelled. I don't suppose you have any clew to the perpetrators of the outrage."

"I have this, sir," said Frank, taking the chloroformed handkerchief from his pocket and passing it to the officer, who unfolded it for inspection.

A gasp of dismay came from Bart Hodge's lips, and his face grew ashen.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“TOBOGGANED.”

That gasp was enough to attract Lieutenant Gordan's attention, and he glanced quickly and keenly at Hodge. Bart caught his breath again, and—sneezed!

It was done skillfully and naturally, so it seemed that the first gasp was but a forerunner of the sneeze.

He immediately begged pardon.

“I trust you have not taken cold, Mr. Hodge,” said the lieutenant, in a queer way.

“Thank you, sir; I think not,” said Bart.

Lieutenant Gordan continued the inspection of the handkerchief.

“Here is a letter in the corner—an ‘H.’ If it were a monogram it might lead immediately to the discovery of the owner and the culprit; but this letter was plainly made in the handkerchief. However, it is a most important clew, and it will go hard with the fellow who has other handkerchiefs like this.”

He carefully folded the handkerchief and put it into his pocket.

Bartley Hodge looked as if he longed to snatch it, but he made no move.

After assuring Frank that everything possible to discover the guilty ones should be done, the lieutenant left the tent.

“There's plinty av fellers thot hiv names beginnin' wid H,” said the Irish lad. “There's Harris, Hardy, Higgins, Hodge——”

He stopped short and stared at Bart, his mouth open.

“Well,” snapped the dark-haired youth, “what are you stopping there for? Go on and name the others.”

“Oi didn’t know but Oi had named enough,” said Barney, in an insinuating tone.

Bart clenched his hands and seemed on the point of making a rush at the Irish lad; but, if he had such intentions, he suddenly changed his mind.

“Just what do you mean by that?” he asked, governing his voice remarkably.

“Mane? Whoy, Oi named four, an’ Oi didn’t know but thot wur enough.”

“Oh; you are very sharp.”

“Don’t mintion it. There do be sharper wans thin mesilf behoind iron bars, to say nothing av you, me b’y.”

Frank was saying nothing, but not a word did he miss. He did not wish to think Hodge had been one of his assailants, but his old enemy was certainly acting in a manner calculated to arouse suspicion. Then the handkerchief with an “H” in one corner was quite enough to make him believe it possible Hodge had taken a hand in the affair.

If so, and it was proved against him, it meant expulsion for Hodge.

Frank had not intended that the loss of his medal should become generally known right away, but the story got out some way, and, before taps, several parties came to the tent to express sympathy, or to ask questions. They were received pleasantly, but it became apparent that Merriwell did not wish to talk.

The news spread, and before the signal for retiring sounded the entire camp knew what had happened. The

matter was discussed in A, B and C streets, and, while some were inclined to smile over the plebe's misfortune, all agreed that it would go hard with the guilty parties if they were found out.

Somehow, the presentation of that medal had seemed to arouse a strong feeling of jealousy among the cadets. Before that occurred, Frank had seemed like a general favorite, but there were now many who seemed to covertly rejoice at his loss.

"The plebe won't swell around with that thing dangling before our eyes holidays," said one. "Why, he would have had the swelled head so bad that his superiors would not have been good enough for him to speak to outside the grounds."

"I think you misjudge Frank Merriwell," said another. "I do not believe he is the kind of a fellow to swell around. I think Merriwell is a fine fellow."

"Think what you like," came sharply from the first. "I shan't cry over the loss of his medal."

"There are lots with you," said another envious fellow. "For myself, I think that particular plebe has fared altogether too easily since coming here. He has scarcely been run through the mill at all."

"That's so," joined in a third. "He has had a soft time of it; but I'm in for making up for lost time."

"What do you mean?"

"It's going to be a fine night for tobogganing."

The cadets seemed to understand this, for they smiled, and one observed:

"It will be darker than a pocket."

"Let's give him a slide."

“That goes.”

“What time?”

“About eleven.”

“We will be there.”

Tattoo gave them warning, and the sounding of taps found every tent dark and silent. The sentries paced their beats, and began calling the hours promptly at the proper time.

“Eleven o’clock, and a-l-l-’s well,” passed round the slumbering camp, and the eyes of the sentries saw nothing to arouse their suspicions, their ears heard no sound to tell them that a night raid on plebes was about to be made.

Frank had remained awake, for all that it was necessary for him to be in bed at the regular hour. He could not sleep. The misfortune that had come upon him was so crushing that his spirit writhed in anguish, and it was with difficulty that he kept from making some unnecessary noise, which must have earned him a rebuke and demerit.

[He heard the sentries call the hour of eleven, but it was as if they were far away—many miles distant. He was in a sort of stupor. Barney Mulloy was breathing regularly at his side, and the breathing from the other bed told that Bart and Hans were fast asleep.]

It might have been ten minutes past eleven when he fancied he heard some one stirring outside the tent. Still he remained in a sort of stupor, idly wondering what it could mean. Had he heard anything, or was it fancy?

Another five minutes slipped away, and then——

Merriwell never knew exactly how it happened, but he

felt himself jerked out of bed, rolled in his blanket, and, thus enveloped, dragged by the heels about the camp. In the language of the academy, he was given a "toboggan slide."

At the same time, Barney, Bart, and Hans had been yanked out of bed in the same mysterious manner.

"It's the ould b'y himsilf!" groaned the Irish lad, as he felt his feet grasped by the mysterious power and found himself swiftly sliding across the floor of the tent. "Oi'm done for intoirely!"

"Shimminy Gristmas!" cried the Dutch lad. "Vot vos der madder mit me, ain'd id? Vos I shackled onto some exbress train alretty yet? Wow! Broke away mit dot feet uf you don'd vant to ged a corner uf your yaw keeked off!"

Then the blanket covered his head and smothered his voice, and he found himself taking a "toboggan slide."

The sound of this racket was heard by the nearest sentry, who challenged, and then shouted:

"Corporal of the guard! Corporal of the guard!"

That cry was enough to bring the corporal down from the guard tents at a run. The officer of the guard also hurried to the point from which the alarm came, but when they reached that spot he found a deserted tent, the bedding being scattered and the plebes gone. The sentry could tell them nothing save that he had heard smothered cries and running feet.

Then came the search for the captured plebes, who were finally found at the farther extremity of the camp, having just crawled from their dust-covered blankets, stunned, dazed, and unable to speak coherently.

Barney was so mad that he could do nothing but claw

the air and gasp, while Hans was half-laughing and half-crying, as he muttered:

“Uf I findt mineself in less as dwenty-sefun bieces, I bet me your life I don’d been afraidt uf cyglones undt earthgwakes after dot!”

CHAPTER XXX.

A LIVELY NIGHT.

When questioned, Bart Hodge said he knew not who his assailants were, but he was fierce in his denunciation of the "outrage," till sternly silenced by the officer of the guard.

The corporal of the guard was trying to get something out of Frank Merriwell, but Frank had little to say, save that he had not the least idea in the world who had dragged him round the camp in his blanket. He seemed to regard it as a good joke, and did not utter a word for which he could be rebuked, much to the corporal's disgust.

Lieutenant Gordan had heard the outcry, and he came down with a bull's-eye lantern, by the light of which he looked the four plebes over.

Hodge was wiping the dust and a little blood from his cheek with a corner of the blanket, and tried to express himself to the lieutenant, only to be cut off and again silenced in a way that was very disagreeable to him.

"Make an immediate inspection, Mr. Harris," directed Lieutenant Gordan, speaking to the officer of the guard. "Mr. Otis and I will attend to these young gentlemen. Take this lantern, sir."

So Mr. Harris took the lantern and went about inspection, while the lieutenant and Otis conducted the four plebes back to their tent.

It must be said to Mr. Harris' credit that he made the inspection faithfully, but he knew plenty of time had

been given for the hazers to get back to their beds, and he was not surprised to find the cadets sleeping soundly, to all outward appearance, for all of the disturbance in camp.

The four "tobogganed" plebes were escorted back to their tent, where they were allowed to light one candle while their beds were hastily made beneath the eye of Lieutenant Gordan, and they turned in again.

Hodge paused long enough to get a handkerchief to wipe the blood from his cheek.

By the light of the candle, Frank saw something on the corner of that handkerchief—something that made his eyes blaze. He made a move to snatch the handkerchief, but seemed to change his mind suddenly, and, for the time, Bart escaped being denounced.

The first night in camp at Fardale had ever been a tumultuous one for plebes, but it had started differently this year, much to the satisfaction of Professor Gunn and Lieutenant Gordan, who began to flatter themselves that better discipline had been established, and that really there was little or no hazing at the academy.

Lieutenant Gordan had really been an officer in the regular army at one time, and he was a graduate of West Point. Why he was not still in the army was not exactly clear, for it could not be discovered that he had left anything but a most honorable record behind him, having seen actual service in an Indian campaign, at which time his superior had spoken of him as a brave and efficient officer.

The lieutenant aspired to model the school at Fardale so much on the lines followed at West Point that it would be regarded by military people, as well as by

common citizens, as the leading private school of that character in the country.

Hazing in camp had been found even more difficult to prevent than hazing in barracks. At West Point rows of gas lamps stand along the sentry lines, and these, with other precautions, made it a very hazardous thing for the old cadets to attempt to "devil" plebes.

There were no gas lamps at Fardale. The camp was wrapped in darkness, save for the light of the moon and stars, which was not always regular, and could never be regarded as sufficient.

Sentries had been kidnapped while on duty, and all manner of pranks had been played at Fardale. Professor Gunn's remonstrances and Lieutenant Gordan's threats had been equally insufficient to put a check to this; but, for some reason, this particular year had seen very few of these things happen.

When the "tobogganed" plebes were securely in bed again, the lieutenant made the rounds of the sentries, testing their knowledge of their duties, and warning them to be fully and constantly on the alert. He did not trust this matter wholly to the corporal of the relief, whose duty it was to see that every sentry was at his post and answered promptly and correctly the catechism.

By the time he had made the rounds, "Twelve o'clock, and a-l-l-'s well," ran round the camp.

It was Sunday morning, and the lieutenant did not fancy there would be any further disturbance, so he retired again, hoping to sleep soundly till *reveille*.

But the excitement for the night was not yet over. There was no intention of letting the "tobogganed" plebes sleep quietly till morning.

And so it came about that Bart Hodge was just begin-

ning to dream that he was battling over a handkerchief with Merriwell, and Merriwell was an elephant that had crushed him to the ground and was smothering him, when he awoke to find himself enveloped in the tent, which had come tumbling down upon them all.

It was exceedingly dark, and, wondering what had happened, Bart managed to get out of bed, when he felt himself clutched once more, and, before he could make an outcry, tumbled into a rickety wheelbarrow, which was surrounded by a score of dark figures. Then away they went, bumping, swaying, creaking and rattling round the camp, Bart's teeth chattering with the jolts, and a sort of stuttering howl of rage coming from his lips.

Hans Dunnerwust tried to keep still and escape, but this did not work. He was yanked out into the open air, and, before he could say "Shimminy Gristmas!" more than once he was perched astride the tent-pole, which lay along several strong shoulders.

"Let 'er rip!" said a low voice.

On either side there were hands to keep the Dutch lad upright on the pole, to which he clung frantically. They started at a run with him, and he let out a wild howl of terror and distress.

"Hellup! Hellup!" he cried. "Uf I don'd peen kildt der odder dime, where I vos alretty yet, ain'd id? I haf ridden mit an exbress drain on, undt straddlet a jack-mule, but dot don'd peen in him mit dees kindt uf a beast! Hellup!" he squawked, as he tried to tie his fat legs in a square knot on the under side of the pole. "Uf somepody don'd hellup me down from dees peast, I pet me my life I vos deadt alretty yet right away! Uf I efer live till morning, I peen goin' to dake oudt den dousandt tollar assurance on mein life, don'd id! Den ven I vos

kildt, I peen baid for id enough to make me reech der rest uf mein life. Hellup! hellup! Uf I don'd ged down off dot pole, I peen cut in dwo alretty yet, und I find meinself twins der morning in."

And so his wild cries trailed all the way round the camp.

Of a sudden, he was dropped heavily to the ground, where he sat rubbing his eyes and staring into the darkness, for every one of the dark forms had vanished like magic, and he was quite alone.

"Uf I don't feel dot blace vere I vos cut in dwo, I pet me more as zwi tollars I haf took a ride on der nightmare. I haf heard uf dot kindt uf a hoss pefore, undt I think I haf peen oudt vor a leedle turn mit him dis efening. Yaw! Dot vos der madder mit Hannah!"

In the meantime, Merriwell and Mulloy had been rolled into the center of the tent-fly, and then they were tossed, kicking and struggling, into the air, to fall on the fly and be tossed again, by the grim band that surrounded it and held it stretched clear of the ground.

"Begobs!" gasped Barney; "it's a loively koind av a noight this do be, Oi dunno!"

"Rather so," admitted Frank, coolly.

"Wow!" howled the Irish lad, as they bounced into the air, clutching wildly at each other. "This bates loife on the bounding billow, Merriwell, me b'y!"

But soon the bouncing became so lively that they could not exchange a word, and it was kept up for some minutes.

All at once a voice said:

"Next time—drop!"

Down they came, and they found themselves in the

midst of their demolished tent, while the dark figures had vanished.

The alarm had been given, and the sentry came panting to the spot. The corporal of the guard quickly appeared, and Lieutenant Gordan, now thoroughly aroused, was not far behind him.

"I will make an immediate inspection of the tents, Mr. Otis," said the lieutenant. "Some one should be punished for this piece of work! See that the tent is put up as soon as possible. Take the name of the sentry on this post. This matter shall be sifted."

Then he hurried away.

But Lieutenant Gordan's inspection proved no more effective than had Harris' less than two hours before. Everything seemed all right everywhere except at that one particular collapsed tent.

"It's little sleep we'll get to-night," thought Frank, as he assisted in the reconstruction of the tent. "We are marked for trouble, and we are getting it."

Hodge and Hans were found and brought back, both seeming badly broken up by what they had been through,

The tent was set up in a remarkably brief space of time, and then the four plebes turned in once more.

Lieutenant Gordan saw that extra sentries were posted at that side of the camp, all of whom were directed to give special attention to the tent that seemed to contain the objects singled out for "torture" by the mischievous cadets.

Then followed a long lull, and it seemed that the excitement was over for the night.

But it was not.

Tired and sore, the four occupants of the tent fell

asleep. Morning was not far away, but it was still very dark when——

“Atchew!”

A smothered sneeze came from Barney.

There were a few moments of silence, and then, from the other bed, came a more violent sneeze:

“A-a-a-atchew!”

It sounded like Hans.

Frank awoke and caught his breath.

“Atchew!” he sneezed.

“Atchew! atchew! a-a-atchew!” burst from Barney.

“Be me saoul, it’s th’ top av me head Oi shplit thot toime!” muttered the Irish lad, sleepily. “Oi must have a bad cold in me head, Oi dunno.”

“Atchew!” sneezed Hodge, who was not awake.

“Atchew! atchew! atchew!” roared Hans, the last sneeze nearly throwing him out of the bed. “Shimminy Gristmas! Vot vos der madder mit mine nose, ain’d id?”

And then they went at it all together:

“Atchew! Atchew! Atchew!”

“Howly shmoke!” gurgled Barney. “Oi fale loike Oi had a whole swarrum av floies crawling up me nose, an’ ivvery floie had a hundred an’ sivintane fate to crawl wid!”

“Say!” gasped Hans; “uf I doan’d haf der hose turned up mine nose bretty soon alretty, I vos going to sneeze der roof of mine headt off!”

“What is the matter?” asked Frank, speaking for the first time. “I believe I smell smoke!”

Clinging to his nose, he quickly got out of bed and opened the fly of the tent to admit fresh air.

At this moment the sentry demanded to know the cause of the commotion in there.

Frank explained that the tent was full of smoke.

And then he found an old iron kettle, in which some kind of a substance was slowly burning, sending up a volume of smoke. Remembering his early school days, Frank knew red pepper had been sprinkled plentifully on the burning substance, and this it was that had caused the sneezing.

It was now so near morning that no further pranks could be indulged in, but it had been a very lively night, to say the least.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CASE OF NERVE.

For all that the following day was Sunday, the boys were forced to spend a great deal of time in getting their tent into order, but were required to attend services in the chapel and be prompt as usual in their other duties.

The interruptions and excitement of the night did not absolve either Hodge or Dunnerwust from a sharp reproof at morning inspection, when they appeared in ranks looking negligent and careless as to dress.

Hans said not a word, having already learned to keep silent under such circumstances, and did not even grin; but Hodge was in bad humor, and he muttered behind the officer's back.

This was promptly and sharply checked, and the demerit recorded, "Hodge, belt and pompon awry, muttering in ranks."

It is not strange that the four boys were rather listless and dispirited, and it was with the greatest difficulty Hans succeeded in keeping awake during the morning service.

There was more or less chaffing when the battalion assembled for breakfast, and this was renewed at dinner.

"Mr. Merriwell," said one smiling cadet, "they tell me you are a great traveler, and that you are particularly fond of coasting. Now, would you mind stating just what sort of coasting you prefer? Is tobogganing in your line?"

"I have found tobogganing very lively and diverting, sir," replied Frank, respectfully, a sly twinkle in his eye.

"And you, Mr. Hodge—what do you think of it?"

"I think it is an outrage that such things can be carried on in a school that is supposed to be for young gentlemen!" was the hot reply.

"Mr. Bond," said the smiling cadet, suddenly growing sober, and turning sharply to a comrade, "will you be good enough to record Mr. Hodge's words. Be careful to take them exactly as they were spoken—'a school that is supposed to be for young gentlemen.'"

Mr. Bond immediately and gravely made a show of taking down the speech, much to Bart's dismay and uneasiness.

"Now, Mr. Mulloy," said the questioner, whose name was Hawkins, "it is reported that you are a great aëronaut—that you have even been known to make ascensions in the night. I would like to know what you think of the business of aërial navigation."

"Well," said Barney, in his most whimsical way, "Oi foind there do be a great many ups an' down to it."

This sent a smile over the assembly, and Hawkins turned next to Hans, who was looking sleepy and dull.

"They tell me you have also traveled, Mr. Dunnerwust," said the chaffing cadet. "Which method of travel do you prefer?"

"Vell," replied the Dutch boy, promptly, "I don'd peen stuck on dot trafeling by rail."

And the whole table roared with delight.

That afternoon was spent in studying and writing letters. Frank had several to write, and he found an opportunity to do so without interruption.

He had finished his last letter and stepped to the front

of the tent, when he saw Hodge, Leslie Gage and Cadet Hawkins talking earnestly together some distance down the street. Gage instantly saw Frank appear, and, with a low word to the others, he walked away.

It seemed, however, that Hodge and Hawkins were engaged in some angry altercation, and they did not mind that Merriwell was watching them.

All at once, to Frank's amazement, Bart suddenly and swiftly slapped Hawkins across the face with a glove, which he held in his hand. Hawkins would have returned the blow with one straight from the shoulder, but Hodge leaped back, and twenty cadets, who had been watching the two from a distance, rushed in and dragged the two apart, hustling them away so the officers should see nothing they would be forced to report.

"Jingoes!" muttered Frank. "That means a fight, and Hodge deliberately brought it on! I wonder what it is about?"

A short time later Bart came to the tent, his face still flushed. To Frank's surprise, he spoke:

"Did you see me slap that fellow, Merriwell?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, he insulted me—he charged me with being concerned in the stealing of your medal."

"Well, weren't you?" asked Frank, coolly.

Bart dropped back a step, and then promptly answered:

"No, sir; I had nothing whatever to do with it."

"How about that handkerchief with your initial in the corner."

"I knew you would bring that up. It is something that puzzles me."

"Then you acknowledge that the handkerchief was yours?"

"No. It certainly was like mine; but I do not believe it was mine?"

"You do not believe it? What do you know about it?"

"I know it was not mine, unless it was stolen from me."

A cold smile came to Frank's face.

"Doesn't that strike you as a little thin, Hodge? Do you expect to squirm out of it that way?"

Hodge flung out one hand, with a desperate gesture.

"You have every reason to be down on me, Merriwell," he confessed. "I acknowledge that; but I swear to you that I had no hand in the stealing of your medal."

"The handkerchief, which is in Lieutenant Gordan's possession, will prove a strong piece of evidence against you, I fancy."

"It may serve to make some trouble for me, but, as evidence, it will amount to nothing."

"How is that?"

"I shall prove an alibi."

"An alibi?"

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"I can prove that I did not leave the limits of the camp on the night that you were waylaid and robbed—last night."

"You say you can prove this?"

"I do. If I prove it, I have a favor to ask of you."

"What favor?"

"I want you to be my second in the fight with Hawkins."

Frank was fairly staggered by the nerve of this request.

"Don't you think you are asking rather too much of me, Hodge?" he said, slowly. "We have never been friends, and your fight with Hawkins came about, as you have said, through his charging you with having a hand in the robbery of the medal. I should think you could see that, under the circumstances, I am in a position where I cannot act as your second."

"Then you refuse?" asked Bart, bitterly.

"I am obliged to."

"Oh, all right! It is the first time I have seen fit to ask a favor of you, and it will be the last! I am willing to bury the hatchet and be friendly, but I see you will not have it so. I have told you the truth about having had nothing to do with the stealing of your medal, as I shall prove it to your satisfaction—or dissatisfaction. You hate me, and I suppose you would be glad to see me expelled from the academy."

"I have no love for you, Hodge," said the other lad, frankly; "but I have no desire to injure you as long as you do right and let me alone. You should know this by the past, for I could have kept you out of the academy had I seen fit to tell the truth concerning you."

"So you fling that in my face! All right! all right! You may think you are too good to have anything to do with me; but I assure you that my people move in circles that neither you nor any of your relations could ever enter. I shall have nothing to do with you in the future —"

"Which will be a great relief to me."

Hodge bit his lip, restraining a violent outburst of anger with no little difficulty.

Somehow he had formed the idea that, for all of the

past, Merriwell would be only too glad to accept him as a friend, and it galled his proud spirit to have his overtures rebuffed.

As for Frank, it seemed possible that Hodge realized the handkerchief had placed him in a very bad box, and he had made this desperate "bluff" in order to make it seem that Merriwell was his friend and did not think him concerned in the robbery, for it would certainly have seemed thus had Frank consented to act as his second.

But the game did not work, and Hodge departed in a huff, after again declaring he would prove an alibi as far as the robbery was concerned.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ESTABLISHING AN ALIBI.

Bart seemed to be in earnest, for he went directly to Professor Gunn, whom he told how the handkerchief bearing his initial had been used in the assault upon Merriwell, and how it had been delivered to Lieutenant Gordan, who might call a court of inquiry.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the professor. "And you say the handkerchief is yours?"

"No, sir. What I say is that it is exactly like mine."

"And you deny that you had any hand in the attack upon and robbery of Mr. Merriwell?"

"Most emphatically, sir."

"But how do you explain this handkerchief business?"

"I do not attempt to explain it further than to say that, if the handkerchief is mine, it must have been stolen from the laundry, or given some other fellow by mistake."

"Slim, sir—slim! It looks bad. If you are really innocent, this handkerchief affair is most unfortunate for you."

"But I want you to call an investigation before Lieutenant Gordan proceeds to that extremity. I will prove to your satisfaction that I did not leave the limits of the camp that evening. That ought to settle this matter so far as I am concerned."

The professor finally agreed to call a meeting and give Bart an opportunity to prove his claim. Bart gave the

names of those he wished to be present, and then departed, muttering:

"I will clear myself of this scrape, and then I will do my best to lick Hawkins. If I succeed, it will come pretty near setting me right with the fellows who are down on me. And I ought to give Hawkins a tight go, for, ever since my fight with Frank Merriwell, I have been taking boxing lessons, with the idea of getting at Merriwell again and doing him up."

Had it not been Sunday, without doubt Hodge would have been waited on immediately by a friend from Hawkins. At Fardale, however, it was a point of honor never to fight on Sundays, nor to transact any business in connection with a fight, so nothing further was done that day, although it became plain that something unusual had taken place, for there was an air of suppressed excitement all over the camp.

Lieutenant Gordan had been at work, and Hodge would have been called to explain the handkerchief matter by him had not Professor Gunn requested him to delay that matter a short time.

The lieutenant did not know why the professor made such a request, but, although he was not quite pleased by it, he agreed.

During the forenoon of the next day no time was given for Hawkins to send a friend to confer with Hodge's second, and so it came about that before going into the fight, Bart was given an opportunity to prove his innocence in regard to the assault and robbery.

Frank Merriwell was notified to appear at a certain hour in one of the academy rooms, and when he arrived there, he found quite a little company assembled.

The three professors were there, looking solemn and

dignified. Lieutenant Gordan was on hand, seeming rather displeased, as if he did not relish having a matter in his province interfered with; Cadet Lieutenant Swift, Cadet Corporal Burrage and plebes Gray and Davis were also present, wearing puzzled expressions on their faces, as if they did not understand just what it was all about, and Bartley Hodge was on hand, looking cool and confident, as if there was no reason in the wide world why he should be anxious.

As soon as Merriwell appeared, the doors were locked, and Professor Gunn made known the reason why they were assembled there.

As usual, he was very verbose, having a great deal to say that might well have been omitted, but he finally made it hazily plain that they had come together at Hodge's request to give him a chance to prove his innocence in connection with the assault and robbery of Merriwell. An object of the secret investigation and hearing was to prevent any false moves, as it certainly would have been a false move had Hodge been arraigned and charged with something of which he was entirely innocent, as he could readily prove.

Lieutenant Gordan smiled sarcastically, but said nothing. He declined to press any charge against Hodge, saying that such an investigation was unmilitary and entirely out of his line.

Then it fell on Professor Gunn to make further explanation, which he did, exhibiting the marked handkerchief that had been saturated with chloroform and used to overcome Merriwell and showing one of Hodge's, which was fresh from the laundry.

The handkerchiefs were exactly alike so far as make and marking were concerned.

Hodge acknowledged that the handkerchief from the laundry belonged to him, and he did not deny that the other might be his.

Then he was given the opportunity to prove an alibi. Hodge was cool and calm, as he arose, saying:

"In order for me to establish my innocence clearly, gentlemen, I will have to ask Mr. Merriwell a few questions. Have I permission to do so?"

Frank nodded, and Professor Gunn gave permission.

"At what time did you leave the academy grounds on Saturday evening, Mr. Merriwell?"

"I do not know exactly—some time between six and seven o'clock, I presume," was the reply.

"You walked to Fardale village?"

"I did."

"Alone?"

"No," said Frank, blushing a bit, yet speaking distinctly and steadily; "I accompanied a young lady."

"I presume you walked slowly?"

"We did."

"It is a full mile to Fardale, is it not?"

"It is called so, I believe."

"And you may have taken thirty minutes to walk it?"

"Yes, possibly more."

"Did you return immediately?"

"No; I stopped to chat a few minutes at the young lady's door."

"In this way you consumed considerable time—possibly an hour? I mean in walking over and in chatting with her at the door."

"Yes, possibly an hour."

"Had the sun set before you reached her home?"

"Yes."

"Was it dark when you started to return to camp?"

"Quite dark."

"And it was very dark when you were attacked?"

"Yes; the sky was overcast, and that made it very dark early in the evening."

At this point Bart produced an almanac from his pocket, turning to the attentive professors, as he said:

"You will please note, sirs, that on last Saturday the sun set at seven-forty-three. Mr. Merriwell has stated that the sun had set before he reached the home of the young lady. It surely could not have been very dark before eight o'clock, or even later."

"Very clear—very," nodded High Jinks, gravely, speaking in a thin, high-pitched voice—a voice that sometimes suddenly shot off into a squeak that was liable to astonish and startle a stranger.

"Very," agreed little Hot Scotch, in a deep, rumbling voice that seemed suitable for a giant.

"Saturday evening, from eight until nine, the band gave a concert," said Hodge. "What time was it when you reached the camp, Mr. Merriwell?"

"Just after the concert was finished," replied Frank.

"Or a few minutes after nine?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long before that did the assault and robbery occur?"

"Possibly thirty minutes."

"Very good," smiled Bart, thoroughly satisfied. "I am now going to prove that I was in camp, listening to the concert from eight till nine o'clock. Having taken part in the sports during the afternoon, I was tired, and I did not move about any during that time. There were

others who felt the same as myself. One was Mr. Davis, here, who sat at my side and chatted with me throughout the entire concert. Is that statement true, Mr. Davis?"

Davis said it was.

"Another," continued Bart, "is Lieutenant Swift, who sat directly behind me, and must have noticed me. Did you observe me, Mr. Swift?"

"I did," replied the young cadet officer promptly, for, although he did not like Bart, he was more than ready to aid in clearing the fellow of such a serious charge, in case he was not guilty. "I noticed you several times during the concert."

"You did not see me leave the locality, sir?"

"I am sure you did not."

"That should be enough," smiled Hodge triumphantly; "but Corporal Burrage was talking with Mr. Swift. It is possible he observed me?"

"I did," said Walter Burrage, who was the brother of Inza Burrage and the friend of Merriwell so far as a yearling may be friendly with a plebe.

"And you did not see me leave the locality?"

"No, sir."

Hodge was now very dignified. His manner plainly said that he had been falsely suspected, and somebody owed him an apology.

"To clinch the matter," he went on, "I will call on Mr. Gray, who is a particular friend of Mr. Merriwell. Mr. Gray sat on the opposite side of me from Mr. Davis, and, although we did not exchange any words, I am quite sure he noticed me. Did you not, Mr. Gray?"

"I did, sir," nodded Ned Gray.

"And, once more, did you see me leave the locality during the time the concert lasted?"

"No, sir."

"That is all," said Hodge, loftily. "I have clearly proved an alibi. It will be seen that I have been very unfairly and unjustly suspected. I have not the least idea in the world how my handkerchief—if that is my handkerchief—came in the possession of the person or persons who robbed Mr. Merriwell. I have nothing more to say about the matter." And he sat down with great dignity.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FRANK CREATES A COMMOTION.

Of those assembled, Lieutenant Gordan was the only one who did not look satisfied.

The officer's face wore a strange expression, but he said nothing.

Strange to say, Frank Merriwell seemed the most relieved of any one present.

In fact, Merriwell's generous heart had not felt at all elated at discovering that Hodge was the owner of the telltale handkerchief. Hodge was an enemy, it is true, but of late he had been very much scorned among the cadets, and it was not Frank's desire to "kick a fellow when he is down."

Still he would not have felt any qualms had it been proved that Hodge was guilty, even though expulsion for the dark-haired lad must have followed such proof.

If Hodge were innocent, Frank desired all along that he should prove it, and, now that Bart had established an alibi, he felt like rushing over and shaking his hand.

This impulse he restrained; but he decided that he must relieve his feelings some way.

Being a very good mimic and amateur ventriloquist, he decided to have some sport at the expense of the two under-professors.

High Jinks and Hot Scotch were both bachelors, but both had been smitten by the charms of a rather frisky widow who lived in Fardale village.

The widow's name was Nancy Cobb, and she had

encouraged both Scotch and Jenks, plainly hoping to capture one of them.

The boys of the academy were well-posted in regard to the situation, and they had been able to secure not a little sport from it.

Now Frank "threw" his voice in such a manner that High Jenks seemed to suddenly squeak:

"Perhaps Professor Scotch may have observed Mr. Merriwell in the village Saturday night, as he was there looking after his girl."

"Eh?" roared the little red-headed professor, bristling up and turning fiercely on his tall, lank companion. "What did you say, sir?"

Jenks looked astounded.

"I didn't say a word," he piped, instantly.

"Yes, you did!" bellowed the little man. "You said——"

"Gentlemen!" cried Professor Gunn; "be silent! I am astonished that you should make such a display before those present. Discipline is the first law of this academy, and I mean to enforce it or see that it is enforced on any and all occasions. If you have any private bickerings, settle them in private."

"Oh, go bag your head!" said a voice that was a strange combination of Jenks' squeak and Scotch's roar.

"What's that?" shouted the head professor, jumping into the air and glaring at his assistants, who trembled and cowered before him. "Which of you said that?"

"It wasn't I, sir," quavered Jenks.

"Nor I," rumbled Scotch.

"But it was one or both of you," persisted Professor Gunn.

"I didn't open my mouth," asserted Jenks.

"I did not speak, sir," assured Scotch.

Professor Gunn looked puzzled and angry.

"I scarcely think my hearing is so much at fault as all that," he said, with great dignity. "I heard one or both of you retort to me in a very disrespectful and slangy manner."

"Rats!"

The word began in a deep rumble, and ended in a squeak.

Professor Gunn nearly fell over backward. Never before in his experience had anything of the kind happened. On all occasions his two assistants had seemed exceedingly polite and respectful in their demeanor toward him.

"This is disgraceful!" he cried—"disgraceful—in-famous!"

"Oh, come off your perch!"

The head professor sprang forward and pointed straight at Scotch.

"You said that!" he cried. "You can't deny it!"

"But I do deny it, sir—I did not say a word."

The man's teeth were chattering, and he was the perfect picture of terror.

"He's crazy," Jenks seemed to declare—"he's stuck on old Aunt Cobb, and that's made him crazy."

That was altogether too much for the red-headed professor. Up he shot, like a rocket, beating the air with his clenched fists, as he bellowed:

"'Old Aunt Cobb!' The lady is twenty years his junior! Everybody heard him then! Dignity or no dignity, I will defend a lady! I'll challenge Mr. Jenks to a deadly duel! This matter shall be settled on the field of honor!"

"Silence! silence! silence!" shouted Professor Gunn, growing purple. "If this does not cease immediately, I will have you both removed from your positions by the board of directors. I believe you are crazy, both of you!"

The threat was enough to make both Scotch and Jenks collapse into their seats, where they sat glaring at each other and trembling with mingled apprehension and anger.

To those who were witnessing this scene it seemed comical in the extreme, and it was with great difficulty that the boys kept from shouting with laughter. Looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes, the two enraged professors held their hands low down by their sides, so Professor Gunn could not see them, and shook them menacingly at each other.

Probably the most disgusted person present was Lieutenant Gordan, whose appreciation of humor was small, and whose ideas of discipline and respectful show were rigid.

"This is what comes of such unofficial investigations," he muttered, angrily. "They do more injury to the academy than anything else possibly could. And still it is Professor Gunn's boast that the school is modeled accurately after West Point!"

He arose and left the room, his manner expressing his feelings full as well as if he had spoken out plainly.

Professor Gunn stood glaring at his two assistants and breathing heavily. Plainly his feelings were too outraged for words. A deep silence fell on the room.

It was broken by the squeaking of a rat.

Now, if there was anything in the wide world that

could make the hair that surrounded the bald spot on Zenas Gunn's head stand erect it was a rat.

He hated and feared rats with all the intensity of his nature, and he showed symptoms of alarm at the first squeak.

Squeak! squeak! squeak!

Professor Gunn grasped a pointer, and, beginning to quiver from head to feet, sprang up on a chair, after the style of a woman who has been frightened by a mouse.

"Hear that!" he cried. "It's a rat! Hear it! He's close around here somewhere. Kill him—kill the beast! Don't let him touch me!"

Scotch and Jenks jumped up and looked about for the rat, both eager to kill the creature, and thus restore themselves in favor with Professor Gunn.

"Young gentlemen," said the professor, appealingly, "will you be good enough to assist in the destruction of this rat?"

"Order out a battalion!" Hot Scotch seemed to roar.

"Arm them with squirt-guns!" High Jinks seemed to squeal.

"This is no time for levity!" snarled Professor Gunn. "Can't you hear that rat squeaking for me? There—there! Hear him! He must be right under this chair!"

Then the alarmed professor made frantic efforts to crawl up on the back of the chair, so he might be still higher from the floor. In doing this he lost his balance, pitched heavily upon High Jinks, whom he clutched frantically about the slender neck.

The head professor was somewhat corpulent, and Jenks was not muscular.

Down they went, and it happened that little Hot Scotch was beneath.

They flattened him out on the floor in a most alarming manner, bringing a roar from his lips such as might have escaped a giant.

The boys rushed forward and dragged them apart, but the little professor was completely done up.

In the meantime it seemed that the rat had escaped, for he was not heard again, and the excitement gradually subsided.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HODGE GROWS DESPERATE.

"Look here, Merriwell," said Ned Gray, drawing him aside as they were returning to camp, "I am dead onto you."

"What do you mean?" asked Frank.

"You made the squeaking that Old Gunn thought was a rat. Now, you can't deny it."

"All right, if you say so," smiled Frank. "I don't like to contradict a friend."

"Well, wasn't it you? Now, be honest?"

"Possibly."

"I knew it!" cried Ned, slapping his thigh. "You are a jolly dog, Merriwell! Now I tumble to something else."

"Is that so?"

"Sure. Twice when High Jinks and Hot Scotch seemed to say something I did not see their lips move."

"Well?"

"I don't believe they made half the talk Old Gunn thought they did. You were at the bottom of it, Frank Merriwell! You are a ventriloquist!"

Frank said nothing, but he was not pleased to have Gray discover the truth, for he knew it might get out and so cause him serious trouble.

Ned was studying Frank's face closely, and he was swift to detect the cloud upon it. Being a bright lad, he immediately divined the cause of the shadow, and he said:

"Now, you needn't be afraid that I will blow on you, Merriwell. I am not that kind of a fellow, and I like fun too well myself. By Jove! you are a dandy!"

Then Frank thought it best to make a "clean breast" and bind Ned to secrecy, which he did.

The two lads laughed heartily over the row Frank had brought about, and the situations seemed far more comical to Ned when he understood that Scotch and Jenks had not said half the offensive things to each other that they were supposed to say.

"You're a genius, Merriwell!" chuckled Ned. "You will be the ruin of this school if you keep on. Why, such a thing as an open quarrel between the professors is unheard of! It will be nuts for the fellows!"

Then Ned spoke of Hodge, whom he cordially disliked.

"It is sure enough that fellow was not in the crowd that robbed you, Merriwell," he said. "He's none too good for a job like that; but he kept out this time."

"That being the case, I am glad he proved his innocence," said Frank, heartily. "I don't want to see any fellow punished for something he didn't do, even though he is an enemy to me."

"You are always generous, old man."

"I try to be just, at least."

That night, immediately after supper, as Hodge was standing in front of the tent, Leslie Gage came up.

"Mr. Hodge," he said, "my friend, Mr. Hawkins, demands an apology from you."

Hodge whistled.

"So you are Hawkins' second!" he sneered. "I did

have an idea that I could count on you as a friend. You have been willing enough to share what my money bought."

Gage colored, and then hotly returned:

"Have a care, plebe, or you will find another fight on your hands when Hawkins is done with you! You are altogether too free with your tongue."

"Oh, am I!" retorted Hodge, with spirit. "Well, I am not afraid of Hawkins, yourself, or your whole company. I will fight you both, one after the other, and I'll fight at any time and any place you may name!"

Frank Merriwell had come to the front of the tent, and he felt like applauding Hodge. For the first time since they first met, he felt a touch of admiration for the proud-spirited, dark-haired lad.

Barney Mulloy gasped with astonishment:

"Thot do bate th' Dutch!"

"Vell, I dunno apout dot," said Hans. "Maype I do petter as dot uf I vas in his blace, ain'd id?"

"Oh, all right, my hearty!" returned Gage, angrily. "I rather think Hawkins will give you all you need, and you will be only too glad to apologize to me then."

At this moment, seeing something was up, Hugh Bascomb came toward the spot.

"What's the row here, Mr. Hodge?" he asked, gruffly, glaring at Gage. "Who is looking for bother? Can I serve you, Mr. Hodge?"

Bart hesitated, colored, glanced swiftly at his tent-mates, and then said:

"Yes, you can act as my second, Mr. Bascomb. I have to meet Mr. Hawkins. I will leave you to make arrangements with Mr. Gage."

Then he walked away, and left the two together.

"By Jove!" said Frank, in a low tone, to Barney, "I am really ashamed! It is pretty hard when a fellow has to go outside his tent-mates for a second."

"Thot's so," confessed the Irish lad; "but Hodge has nivver a saoul but himsilf to blame at all, at all."

"That is true enough, perhaps. However, it was plain he did not accept Bascomb from choice. He appeared rather ashamed to be forced into taking him at all. Bascomb is a coarse, cheap fellow, and Hodge has good blood in his veins, for all of his record. He is no coward when it comes to a fight, and I do not believe he is unusually cowardly under any circumstances, though he is easily rattled, and loses his head."

"Ye're too aisy wid him, Frankie, b'y. Whoy, av he had done to some fellys pwhat he has to yez, they'd nivver rist till they had squared it wid him."

"Oh, what's the use to hold a grudge like that. I am going to see this fight, and I hope Hodge will lick Hawkins."

That evening a number of the cadets succeeded in leaving the grounds on various excuses, some dodged the sentries, and at least fifty fellows escaped in one way or another.

They were all headed for the old boathouse down the cove.

Not many of the plebes knew of the impending fight, but Frank, Barney, and Hans found a way to be on hand.

It was an excited mob that gathered in the boathouse, at the windows of which three thicknesses of old sails had been hung, so the light might not be seen on the outside.

Again, through his second, Hawkins demanded an apology from Hodge, but the dark-haired boy simply laughed at him, and then they stripped.

Hawkins showed up splendidly. His flesh was hard and firm, and the muscles of his arms, back, and breast stood out plainly in folds, telling that he had trained to a point that was little short of perfection. He was confident of "doing" the plebe with very little trouble.

It seemed that Hawkins had a record as a fighter, and Hodge was told over and over that he had insulted the best man in the whole corps.

Bart's face was gray and hard, and his eyes blazing. He said very little, but he had a sort of do-or-die look that seemed to indicate that he meant to win the fight if it lay in him.

He did not show up so well when he had stripped to the waist, although he seemed supple and sinewy. Plainly he lacked the advantage Hawkins had received by long and steady training.

But the two lads were going into the fight in entirely different moods. Hawkins was confident, as he had never been whipped by any one since entering the school, and he knew that, considering the training he had received, he should be scientifically, as well as physically, Hodge's superior.

On the other hand, Hodge was desperate, although wonderfully cool. In his heart he seemed to feel as if it were a matter of life or death with him. Of late he had been under a cloud; if he could whip Hawkins, he fancied the cloud would lift. And he felt that the cloud must be lifted if he remained in Fardale Academy, for his proud spirit could not endure the present condition of things.

He would fight like a wildcat, and his opponent was liable to meet with an unpleasant surprise.

Frank read all this in Bart's face.

"I am going to see that he has fair play," muttered Merriwell.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FRANK SEES FAIR PLAY.

There was a strained hush of expectation as the two lads came up to the scratch.

The referee gave the word, and the fight was on.

Hawkins was cool and deliberate, while it was plain to observing eyes that Hodge was holding himself in check.

Both boys put up a "guard" that was correct, and there was very little difference in the positions they assumed.

It was plain that Hawkins had determined to lead Hodge on at first, and so find out what he knew about "the art of self-defense." He feinted and rushed several times, but Bart remained cool, and was not deceived.

The spectators began to show impatience.

"Come, come, Hawkins!" somebody called; "are you going to fool with that plebe all night?"

"Sail in lively and finish the fight," advised another. "We can't stay here long, you know."

It seemed that Hawkins decided to take this advice, for he began to force the fighting.

As Hodge had shown no skill in getting after him when he feinted, Hawkins decided that he could not be very dangerous, and so he was somewhat careless in looking after his own face and body. He crowded Bart back, and then, feinting with his right, struck a smashing blow with his left.

Hodge dodged a bit, but he received enough of the blow to send him staggering.

He came back at Hawkins like a leaping panther, his dark eyes flashing fire.

Smack—crack—smack!

Three blows were struck so swiftly that the watching lads could scarcely tell who delivered them.

Hawkins struck but one of them.

Hodge gave him the other two, one on the left breast, and the other fairly between the eyes.

Both lads reeled backward, but Hawkins could not recover till he had fallen on one hand and one knee.

Hodge followed him up like an enraged panther, but the referee shouted time as Hawkins struggled to his feet, and the first round was finished.

The excitement was now intense, for Hodge had shown that he was there to fight, and Hawkins had been more than matched in the first round.

Still the older cadet was the favorite, and one confident admirer offered odds of ten to one on him.

"I will take that bet," cried Frank Merriwell. "Put up your dough!"

That fellow was taken aback, but he quickly saw a way out of the trap, and so he returned:

"Up she goes—a whole dime. Produce your cent, plebe, or back down."

"Oh, come off the roof!" returned Frank, scornfully and slangily. "You give me that tired feeling! I thought you had blood, and really wanted to bet."

This might have produced more trouble, but, at this moment, the two fighters faced each other once more.

Hodge had not failed to note that Merriwell had offered to bet on him, and, for some reason, that made him more than ever determined to lick Hawkins.

But Hawkins had learned that his opponent was not to

be trifled with. He resolved to go in and end the fight in short order.

The next round was a rattler from start to finish. Hawkins pressed Hodge, following him up doggedly, and Bart was hammered more or less, without getting a single effective blow in return.

"One more round like that will finish him, old man," said Gage to Hawkins, as they were resting at the call of time. "Teach the fellow a lesson."

"Oh, I will do him in short order now," was the confident assertion.

Bart was given no encouragement by his second.

"You're no match for that fellow," declared Bascomb. "He will hammer your head off."

Not a word did Hodge say in reply, but he set his teeth firmly, resolved in his heart never to be licked till he was completely knocked out.

Merriwell had heard Bascomb's words, and he said to Barney:

"It's a shame! I believe in giving any fellow a fair show, and I will bet every cent I can raise that Hodge's own second is against him! It is a conspiracy to get him licked."

"Well, Frankie, b'y, ye can't blame thim fer not loikin' th' blagguard, can yez?"

"I believe in giving a fellow a fair show, whether I like him or not. But that is not it. Some of these fellows—Bascomb, for instance—have professed to be very friendly with Hodge, and now they are betraying him. It is nasty—that's what!"

Frank's face showed his disgust and indignation. He did not stop to consider the matter, or he might have known that Hodge had bought "friendship" with a free

expenditure of money, and that kind of affection is never sincere.

Hawkins had decided to act on his second's advice, and he was doing his best to end the fight in the third round. For some seconds he gave Hodge far the worst of it, but Bart was watching his chance, and, when crowded, he suddenly caught Hawkins round the waist with his right arm, passed his left leg behind the fellow, caught his right arm with a firm grip, and then——

Up went Hawkins' feet into the air, and down he dropped upon the back of his neck.

Hodge had given him the side-fall.

The shock dazed and benumbed the surprised cadet. The referee began counting slowly, while Hodge stood waiting for his antagonist to rise.

Was it possible Hawkins had been so stunned that he would be counted out?

No! He sat up, leaped backward, and was on his feet, ready to meet Bart again.

Thus ended the third round.

"For Heaven's sake, don't let him do that again!" gasped Leslie Gage, in Hawkins' ear. "You gave me an awful fright! I thought he had stunned you so you would not be able to get up before you were counted out!"

Hawkins grinned in a sickly way.

"I was trying to finish him then and there, and I thought I had him too rattled to clinch. He's got sand."

"I knew that to start with. I told you that you would have to go at him hot, and finish him in short order. He is not the kind of a fellow to lie down and be counted out after he had taken a little punishment."

Bart had been hammered rather severely, and his face

was bruised and bleeding, but he did not seem to mind this in the least. He sat quietly with the blanket wrapped about his shoulders, allowing Bascomb to wipe the blood with a moist towel, and the gleam in his eyes told that he had not the least thought of giving in.

"It's no use, Hodge," said Bascomb; "you are getting much the worst of it. He will finish you next time."

Frank heard this, and it was more than he could stand. He had no love for Hodge, but he did have a love of fair play.

"You are a beautiful second, Mr. Bascomb!" he cut in. "You are trying to discourage Mr. Hodge. That is not right. He has held his own thus far, and you know it; Hawkins came near being counted out just now. One more fall like that will fix him."

"Bah!" retorted Bascomb. "You ought to feel proud of yourself! Not one of Mr. Hodge's tent-mates would act as his second."

That cut Frank, whose face reddened.

Time was up, and the two lads stepped into the ring again.

Now came the hottest round yet seen. At the very start there was a whirl at "infighting," but, seeing Hawkins was getting the best of this, Hodge broke ground and retreated. Hawkins followed, making a rush, which the other barely succeeded in avoiding by a duck and dodge. On this Hodge came up under Hawkins' arm, and then he found his best opportunity. The blow he gave Hawkins in the neck would have knocked down an ordinary prize-fighter, and the older cadet measured his length on the floor.

"Vell, dot vos a corker!" observed Hans Dunnerwust,

who had kept still till this moment. "I haf nefer seen der peat uv dot alretty yet."

Still Hawkins could not be counted out. He got upon his feet, but he was decidedly "groggy" to the end of the round.

Bascomb, for the first time, pretended to congratulate Hodge.

"By Jove! I believe you will do him yet, old man!" he said, as he wrapped the blanket about the shoulders of the heavily-breathing lad. "You are astonishing everybody. Here—have a drink of water. It will do you good."

He thrust a tin dipper into Bart's hand, and Bart lifted it to his lips.

The dipper was suddenly dashed to the floor, and its contents spilled.

Frank Merriwell did it.

"Not on your life, Bascomb!" he said. "I don't know what you put in that water, but I saw you drop some kind of a powder into it, as did several others. I have proof on that point. I am here to see fair play, and I mean to see it."

Bascomb snarled out some fierce words, and would have made a rush at Merriwell, but he was held in check, while several said:

"Not here—now! Wait till after this first matter is settled."

"Oh, I'll hammer the face off that fellow!" grated Bascomb.

Hodge was a little dazed, but he realized that Merriwell had interfered in his behalf, and he declined to take a drink of water from anybody.

"I can go another round without it," he said.

When the two lads came again to the scratch, it was seen that Hawkins had lost much of his serene confidence, while Hodge was as determined as ever. And now Bart pressed the fighting, doing it in a way that gave the other lad all he could attend to—and a little more.

The excitement among the spectators was at fever pitch. They watched every movement of the battling lads with breathless interest, for a better fight had not been witnessed in the old boathouse for many moons.

Hodge was like a raging panther. He darted at Hawkins from every side, and his blows began to tell, while he received none in return. The cadets rose up on their toes, for they saw the end approaching, and a most unexpected end, at that.

Bart smashed Hawkins on the nose, then he thumped him in the eye, gave him a terrible punch in the wind, and ended with an upper-cut that lifted the fellow off his feet and stretched him on his back.

And there Hawkins lay, while he was counted out, amid the greatest excitement ever known in the old boathouse.

Hodge had won the fight.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MEDAL FOUND—ARRESTED.

When it was all over, his blood leaping from the result of the affair, Frank Merriwell looked about for Bascomb.

The fellow had disappeared.

"He's gone, Frankie, b'y," chuckled Barney. "It's me proivate opinion thot he is a big shtuff. He didn't dare shtop an' mate yez."

"I didn't care to get into a fight with him," confessed Frank; "but I was determined to see fair play, and it looked suspicious when he dropped the powder into that water."

Now that the fight was over, there was hustling to get out of the boathouse and back to the camp.

Having won, Hodge was surrounded by plenty of fellows who were eager to congratulate him, for all that they had expected and hoped that Hawkins would be the victor.

Frank would have remained and seen that Bart was properly rubbed down, but there were now enough to do that, and so, after a little hesitation, he departed, Barney and Hans accompanying him.

Hawkins was bitter when he recovered sufficiently to realize what had happened. He swore over and over that he would get square with Hodge.

Bart had little to say. For once in his life, he was not boastful, and he was rather cold toward those who had

scorned him a short time before, but flocked around him now.

"A lot of sycophants," he thought, contemptuously. "I would give more for one fellow like Merriwell to stand by me than for this whole crowd that shifts every time the wind changes."

That night, a little while before taps, having got back safely to the tent, Hodge suddenly turned on Frank, saying:

"I want to thank you, Merriwell. One or two fellows have told me they saw Bascomb put the powder in that water. If I had taken it, I should have been knocked out."

"That's all right, Hodge," assured Frank, carelessly. "I simply did what I would want any fellow to do for me under the same circumstance. But I thought Bascomb was a particular friend of yours?"

"I thought so, too; but hereafter I don't take much stock in that kind of friends. I suppose he has turned against me since I refused to take a hand in—er—er—a certain piece of business."

Hodge's face flushed. It was well patched up with strips of court-plaster.

He did not say just what the piece of business referred to was, and he was not questioned.

For the first time since entering the school, there seemed something like a friendly feeling between Merriwell and Hodge; but neither offered the other a hand.

Hodge awoke the next day to find himself famous, for he had done something no fellow of the academy had ever accomplished before—he had licked Hawkins.

It would have been natural for Hodge to swell with pride and put on an air of great importance. In fact, it

was difficult for him to suppress a desire to do so; but he thought:

"If Merriwell had knocked Hawkins out, he would have kept still and made no show over it. Merriwell is a pretty good fellow to model after, and I am going to try it."

So those who had formed the opinion that Hodge was a vain and conceited coxcomb were astonished to note that he neither boasted, strutted, nor acted as if he was proud of what he had done.

Perhaps Frank Merriwell was as surprised as any one.

"Hodge must be ill," he said to Barney. "He isn't putting on any airs."

"Ill!" echoed the Irish lad. "Begobs! he must be sick enough to doie!"

Of course both Hodge and Hawkins were obliged to "fake" some very pretty stories to explain the condition of their faces; and equally, of course, their stories were not believed, although they were not questioned too closely.

"Affairs of honor" could not be stopped at the academy, and it was thought best to be blind to them as far as possible.

Hawkins was sullen and bitter. A few times he repeated his threat to get square with Hodge, but, for the most part, he kept still.

Just before dinner, as Frank was washing, Lieutenant Gordan suddenly appeared at the tent opening, with an orderly sergeant and squad at his back.

"Mr. Hodge," said the lieutenant, in a tone that made Bart pale and shrink apprehensively, "I have been informed that you have in your possession an article belonging to Mr. Merriwell."

"What is that?" asked Hodge, huskily.

"It is the medal of honor granted him by the Congress of the United States."

Bart suddenly stiffened up.

"Then you have been misinformed, sir," he said, stoutly. "I have no such article in my possession."

"In that case, you must have disposed of it in a very brief space of time, for you were known to have it last night—if I have not been deceived."

"You have been deceived, sir," asserted Bart, holding himself in check with the greatest difficulty. "Some one has been lying to you."

"It is possible; but I presume you will not object to being searched in the presence of Mr. Merriwell?"

Bart's teeth clicked, and there was a choking sound in his throat. To be searched! That was more than he expected under any circumstances. He was tempted to refuse, and then, unable to repress his feelings, he burst out:

"You may search me, but somebody shall pay dearly for this!"

Lieutenant Gordan stepped forward without another word, and began the search.

In a very few moments he produced something which he held up for all to see.

It was the missing medal!

Hodge gave a cry of astonishment and horror, his face growing deathly pale. If his surprise was not genuine, then he was in truth a very good actor.

"There is some mistake!" he cried. "I—I——"

"Silence, sir," came coldly and sternly from the lieutenant's lips. "You will be given a chance to explain before the court-martial."

Pale, trembling, crushed, Bart relapsed into silence, a light of despair in his dark eyes.

"Mr. Merriwell," said Lieutenant Gordan, "take your medal, sir, and guard it well."

Frank stepped forward and accepted the precious token; but his hand shook, and his face was fully as pale as Bart's. Not a word could he say, although he tried to speak.

Hodge looked at Merriwell appealingly, but Frank did not meet the look. He turned away, and something like a smothered groan came from Bart's blue lips.

"Mr. Hodge, you are hereby placed under close arrest, and you will be conveyed at once to the guard-tent. March!"

Out of the tent Bart mechanically stepped, the orderly and the members of the squad closed around him, and away he was marched to the guard-tent, where he was to be held a prisoner in disgrace.

In less than fifteen minutes the entire encampment knew Merriwell's medal had been restored to him, while Bartley Hodge had been arrested, and was in the guard-tent, awaiting court-martial and dismissal—or, in other words, expulsion from Fardale Academy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CRY OF FIRE.

"Fire! fire! fire!"

That cry ran through the camp the night following the arrest of Bartley Hodge.

"Where is the fire?"

"It's the academy! Fire! fire!"

"The academy is afire!"

That was enough to send the cadets leaping into their clothes in short order, and away they raced across the parade ground.

There was a reddish glow in two of the upper windows of the academy.

"It's in Professor Gunn's laboratory!" shouted more than one.

The professor was found on the steps of the building, wringing his hands and groaning.

"The building is lost!" he sobbed. "It will burn to the ground!"

"Not if there is a possibility of saving it!" shouted Frank Merriwell, who was among the first to arrive. "Where are the fire grenades?"

"I know!" cried Cadet Hawkins. "This way! Follow me!"

The lads plunged into the building, leaving Professor Gunn moaning:

"It's no use! The smoke is so thick up there that they can't get near the fire."

"How did it start?" he was asked.

"I was experimenting with some chemicals, and there was an explosion."

In the bustle that followed, Professor Gunn was thrust aside and lost sight of completely. Once in a while, his voice was heard moaning or directing the boys to save something.

The water of the academy was supplied from a pond some distance away, and the pressure was enough to make a good head. There was plenty of hose, and places to attach them on every floor. More than this, the academy had a regularly organized fire brigade, and the work of fighting the flames was begun in earnest.

The boys had no idea of letting Fardale Academy burn if the fire could be checked and extinguished.

As has been said, Merriwell and Hawkins were among the first to go bounding up the stairs.

On the floor where the fire was the smoke was almost thick enough to be cut into squares with a knife!

Hawkins did not hesitate to rush into the heart of this smoke.

"This way!" he called to Frank. "This way for the grenades!"

Frank followed him.

They reached the rack where the grenades were kept, and, securing all they could carry, then ran down the corridor toward the room where the flames could be heard crackling in a manner that indicated the fire had obtained quite a start.

The door of Professor Gunn's laboratory was thrust open by Hawkins.

To Frank's horror a sheet of flame burst forth and seemed to completely enwrap the lad, who reeled back without a cry, and dropped to the ground.

Frank ran forward and hurled his grenades into the room. Then he caught up those Hawkins had dropped, and threw them also.

By this time he was nearly overcome with smoke, but he could not retreat and leave Hawkins there.

"I must save him!" thought Frank.

Hawkins' clothes were on fire in one or two places, and these spots Frank beat out with his hands, while his own face was almost blistered by the heat that beat upon him from the open door of the burning room.

With a last fierce effort, he lifted Hawkins and staggered along the corridor, reached the stairs, and plunged downward, passing some of the fire brigade, who were coming up with hose.

Frank did not stop nor put Hawkins down till the open air was reached, and here he dropped in a heap, with the unconscious lad across his body.

* * * * *

The academy did not burn. The grenades thrown by Frank Merriwell checked the flames till several streams of water were turned into the room, and, for all of the smoke, the fire-fighters took turns at the hose till the last spark of fire was out.

But Hawkins had been severely burned, and Dr. Brown looked grave, as the boy lay moaning with pain on a bed, his face and hands covered with bandages.

"It is my punishment!" sobbed Hawkins. "I am sure of it! I think I am going to die! I must see Bartley Hodge. Bring him here."

So Hodge was brought under guard, still a prisoner who had been arrested for a most reprehensible offense.

"I am going to die, Hodge," said the boy on the bed,

"and I want to make a confession before I go. I want Lieutenant Gordan and Professor Gunn to hear me."

The lieutenant and the professor were present, as was also Frank Merriwell, whose face had been scorched, and who needed Dr. Brown's attention.

"Hodge did not steal Merriwell's medal," declared Hawkins. "I stole it myself!"

"You?" cried Lieutenant Gordan. "What made you do such a thing?"

"Because I took a dislike to Merriwell. I tried to get Hodge to go into the scheme, but he said he had used Merriwell mean enough, and he refused to have anything to do with it. I hated him after that."

"But you were not alone? Who aided you?" questioned the lieutenant.

"I can't tell that. I don't want to injure anybody; but I want to do the square thing now. I was the one who took the medal from Merriwell's breast, and I had it placed on Hodge's person. There is no need to explain how this was done, for, as I just said, I do not wish to harm any one else. I insulted Hodge, and he got the best of me in a fair fight. Then I swore to get even. So I had the medal worked onto him, and then I reported that I had seen it in his possession. Oh, it was a mean trick, but I am getting my pay for it now!"

"This is most surprising!" exclaimed Professor Gunn. "Then Mr. Hodge must be entirely innocent?"

"He is."

"Well! well! well!" gasped the professor; and that was all he could say.

Perhaps Bartley Hodge was as much relieved as any one. He had been crushed and overwhelmed by his mis-

fortune, but a new light came to his face, and he now met the eyes of those around him.

Frank Merriwell stepped forward, and his voice was not exactly steady, as he said:

"Mr. Hodge, I congratulate you. Mr. Hawkins has acted like a man, and you are out of a very bad scrape."

"I know I have not always treated you just right, Merriwell," confessed Hodge. "But I hope you heard him say that I refused to take any hand in the stealing of your medal?"

"I did."

"I can't help it if I am not perfect," said Hodge; "and I have resolved to do my best to overcome my faults. You have used me better than the fellows who pretended to be my friends, Merriwell, and now I want to ask if you will shake hands and call the past buried?"

"Of course I will!"

And they shook hands.

* * * * *

Hawkins was not burned as seriously as was at first supposed, and he was soon out of danger.

But there could be nothing further for him at Fardale Academy, and so he was allowed to resign and go home.

Hodge and Merriwell were the only ones who accompanied him to the station and bade him good-by. He shook hands with them, and his last words were:

"Stick by Merriwell, Hodge; he's all right. I'm going to try school somewhere else, if the governor will let me, and I mean to be white from this on."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHALLENGED.

It was midsummer at Fardale Military Academy, and the "plebes" who had entered the school some weeks before were now so well broken to ordinary drillwork that they made a very commendable showing.

The yearlings had grown somewhat weary of hazing, although it had not ceased by any means, and each older cadet had his particular "fag" to attend to the "drudgery."

By this time life in camp had grown to be an old story, and the boys were casting about for something to vary the monotony.

A group of cadets who had gathered on one of the camp's streets were holding an earnest discussion about various sports.

"In two weeks comes the annual ball game with Eaton," said Walter Burrage. "I wonder how our team will be made up this year?"

"Gage will be captain, I think," said Cadet Lieutenant Swift. "You know we lost our old captain at last graduation. He was a good man, but the team was weak in the box last year, and Eaton beat us thirteen to nine."

"What makes you think Gage will be captain?" asked Harvey Dare.

"Because he is a brilliant player, and he was captain of one of the strongest amateur teams in the State before he came here to school."

"But he is not particularly popular."

"It is not popularity, but playing, that counts in a game of baseball."

"I say," cut in another cadet, "it doesn't seem to me that the boys are practicing as much as they ought. Why, they should have had the team made up long ago. It is team work that counts in a game of ball."

"That's right," nodded Swift. "That matter should be settled at once."

"We should have several practice games with the plebes."

"Yes, for there may be some material among them that we can use."

"Have you noticed Hodge's playing?"

"Not particularly; but Merriwell acts like a ball player, and I believe there is good timber in him. He might show up well another year."

"It is not another year we care for. What we are bothering about just at present is this year. We've got to have a good team to meet Eaton."

"What position does Gage play?"

"He pitches."

"Whom have we to hold him?"

"Hawkins."

"Why, Hawkins is gone, as you very well know. It strikes me that our team is badly crippled this year."

Lieutenant Swift looked rather annoyed. He had not thought up to this moment that when Phil Hawkins left the academy the ball team had lost its best catcher.

"Harris will have to go behind the bat," he said.

Burrage smiled.

"You know Harris is a bum thrower," he said. "He is all right as a back-stop, but any one can steal bases on him. Why, with Harris under the bat, if those Eaton

fellows ever got first, they would not hesitate to go down to second on the first ball pitched. No, no, Swift, Harris will not do, if we have any ambition to win this year. The Eatons are dandy base-runners, and we must have a corking good thrower."

Swift knew this was true, and he bit his lips in perplexity.

"I do not know of a good man to fill his place," he finally admitted.

"What are we going to do about it?"

"To-morrow is Saturday. We must have a game with the plebes. After that, we'll have to settle on a team."

"That's right. Where is Gage. He must send a challenge."

"Here comes Gage."

The cadet who approached the group carried himself with a superior air, as if he were fully convinced of his own importance.

"What's up now, gentlemen?" he asked, with dignity.

"We were discussing baseball and the prospect of holding the Eatons' good play this year," replied Burrage.

"Beat them!" smiled Gage, scornfully. "Why, if our team is made up right, we will beat them to death!"

"If our team is made up right," echoed Swift. "But there's the rub. It is not made up at all, and the time for the game with Eaton is close at hand. What are we going to do?"

"Get a move on us."

"That's right. The most of the old team is in it, but we need some new blood. There may be some good men among the plebes. For instance, Hodge is——"

"What?" cried Gage, in amazement. "You don't mean to say you would give that cad a show on the team?"

"It is playing that counts, as Dare just observed. We want to beat Eaton, and, in order to have any show, we will have to select our best players, whether they are cads or not. Another man who shows up well among the plebes is Merriwell."

"If those fellows go on the team, you may count me out," said Gage loftily. "I do not run with that kind of a crowd."

"Why, what is the matter with Merriwell? He is pretty popular with the fellows, and——"

"He may be popular with some; but there is a time coming when he will not be so popular. Mark my words."

"Oh, you have taken a dislike to him. You will get over that pretty soon, the same as Hodge did. Remember how Hodge hated him? Now he thinks there is not another fellow in the world who is quite Merriwell's equal."

"Well, I am no sycophant, and I do not care to be compared with Hodge. That fellow makes me sick! I'd think a good deal more of Merriwell if he had run Hodge out of the school. I've got no use for softies."

"If you run up against Merriwell, you are liable to find he is no softie. He is a fighter, and he has sand, else Congress never would have presented him with a medal of honor for bravery in twice saving Miss Burrage from death."

"Oh, that medal business gives me a pain! I don't see that Merriwell did anything great. He is stuck on Inza Burrage, and she is stuck on him, so——"

"So I advise you to be careful what you say about

either of them in my presence, sir," said Walter Burrage, sharply. "You may have forgotten that she is my sister. As far as Merriwell is concerned, I am ready to stand up for him anywhere and any time. He is white and square, which is more than can be said for some fellows in this academy who stole his medal from him."

"I hope you don't mean anything," sneered Gage, with a sidelong look at Burrage.

"I'm not calling any names, but any one who finds the coat fits is welcome to wear it. Phil Hawkins was more of a man than some fellows who are still in the academy, for he came out and made a clean breast of it before he left."

"Oh, he was soft! Because he was burned a bit in the academy fire, he thought he was going to die, and so he confessed that he had taken a hand in swiping Merriwell's medal. It's a wonder he didn't blow on the fellows who were in with him."

"Oh, well, drop this!" broke in Harvey Dare. "This is not settling the baseball problem. Are you a pitcher, Gage?"

"Well, I was one of the pitchers on my team before I came here to school. We whipped everything that called itself amateur, and we gave one or two professional teams a tight go. I rather think I am pitcher enough for any batters the Eatons may have."

"Well, you ought to have a good man to hold you, and Hodge is the best we know."

"I will not pitch to him."

"Then we will have to find somebody else. We must have a practice game with the plebes to-morrow."

"Sure."

"They should be challenged at once."

"Now is the time to do it," said Walter Burrage. "Here comes Merriwell and Hodge."

"Hodge tags him about like a puppy," sneered Gage. "I should think Merriwell would get sick of it."

Instantly the two lads found themselves surrounded, while the cadet lieutenant soberly said:

"We were waiting for you. You are both challenged to meet members of the advanced classes on the field of honor. Do you accept the challenge? or do you show the white feather?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BEFORE THE GAME.

Hodge looked serious, but Merriwell laughed.

"We are neither of us in the habit of showing the white feather," he said; "so I suppose we'll have to accept the challenge."

"Remember, this is to be a battle to the bitter end," warned Swift. "Don't be rash."

"To the bitter end let it be," smiled Frank. "Whom are we to meet?"

"I am one of the principals, and Mr. Gage is another."

"Really? You say Mr. Gage is 'another.' Are there still others?"

"There are, sir."

"How many?"

"Seven."

"Seven and two are nine," said Frank, with quick intuition. "I presume we will be permitted to select seven friends?"

"Oh, I suppose we shall have to allow you that privilege."

"And, being the challenged party, we will name the weapons—bats and balls."

"It's not easy to get ahead of you, Merriwell; you have tumbled to the game."

Bart looked relieved.

"I didn't know but we had another fight on hand," he admitted.

"Oh, we are not anxious to fight with plebes when we

can avoid it," said Leslie Gage, in a way that was distinctly offensive.

"I shouldn't think you would be since the last time one of you fellows went up against a plebe," said Frank, in a good-natured way.

He looked at Bart and smiled, but it was evident that Gage did not take kindly to this observation of Merriwell's.

"You fellows don't want to get swelled heads because Hodge went up against something easy and came out best by an accident," he snapped. "There are others."

"If I remember rightly, it was said at the time that Hawkins was a great fighter—that he had licked everybody he had tackled. But we are not speaking of fighting now, but of sport, so let's hold our tempers. When is this engagement to come off?"

"How will to-morrow afternoon do?" asked Swift.

"That suits me. I will get together some kind of a team, and try to make it interesting for you."

"Oh, we don't expect the game will amount to much," said Leslie Gage, loftily; "but we thought we might get some practice out of it. Of course, you plebes won't be in it with us."

"Oh, of course not," smiled Frank. "We don't expect to, but we will do our best, all the same."

"And we may give you something of a surprise party," put in Bart.

Leslie laughed scornfully, not deigning to say anything further. That laugh was enough to bring a hot flush to Bart's cheeks, and he glared at Gage as if longing to strike him then and there; but Frank Merriwell's hand dropped on his arm, and he quickly relapsed before this silent warning of his friend.

"Then it is settled, I presume?" said Swift. "We will meet on the field of honor to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock."

"That is satisfactory," assured Frank. "You will find nine of us ready for you at that hour."

After a few words more, Merriwell and Hodge resumed their walk.

"Thank you for warning me against getting into a passion with Gage, old man," said Hodge, as soon as they were beyond earshot from the group. "I am altogether too quick, I know; and you are doing me a great favor when you hold me in check. I am trying to learn to govern my temper."

"That's all right, Bart," said Frank, in his friendly way—a way that unconsciously drew others to him. "There's no use in getting into a row needlessly. I believe in fighting when a fellow has to, but not in fighting every chance one can. Gage is aggravating, but it is his way."

From that time till noon the following day Frank was busy making up his ball team. Hodge was to catch, and Frank would pitch. Barney Mulloy, who was a heavy batter and a sure catch of all manner of thrown balls, was selected to cover first base. Sam Winslow was placed on second, and the big, ham-fisted fellow called Hugh Bascomb was given the third bag. A lively little fellow, Sammy Smiles, occupied the territory at short, and the outfield was made up of some fairly good men. Taken all together, Frank believed he had made up a fairly strong team, and, more than ever, was he confident of giving the regular nine a "sharp go."

One thing Frank regretted, and that was that he could not find an opening for Hans Dunnerwust. Hans pro-

tested that he could play baseball in a way to surprise those who knew him, and, although he was fat and rather clumsy, Frank would have given him a show had it been possible.

Every Saturday afternoon crowds came from Fardale village and neighboring places to witness the cadets at their sports.

Somehow it became quite generally known that there was to be a ball game on this particular Saturday afternoon, and an unusually large number of spectators assembled.

The regular ball team had a handsome gray uniform, with "Fardale" lettered on the breasts of the shirts.

The plebes appeared in blue flannel shirts and uniform trousers, making a good appearance.

Merriwell was very popular with the visitors at the academy, and he was greeted by a round of applause when he appeared on the field at the head of his team.

It was this very popularity with the public that made many of the older cadets jealous of him, and thus gave him enemies in the school.

Hodge had been one of the jealous ones in former days, but, from being an enemy, he had turned completely around and was now Frank's admiring and unwavering friend.

"Hear them cheering that stiff!" sneered Leslie Gage. "Oh, it makes me very, very weary! I will take particular pains to show him up this day, see if I don't. He won't get a hit off me, and I mean to hammer him all over the field."

Gage was a good batter, and it was believed he would find Merriwell "a mark."

The regular team had been practicing some time when

the plebes appeared, and so they gave up the field for the latter to have their turn.

Merriwell took the stick and batted round, while Hodge caught and did some throwing.

Merriwell gave the word for every move and every throw, and, to the surprise of the older cadets, he was obeyed with a promptness and precision that told how utterly his men relied on him and were confident that he was the proper captain.

Hodge's throwing was easy and precise. The way he tossed the ball down to second gave the regulars an idea that they might not find it easy to purloin bags that day.

Gage grew uneasy as he watched.

"We're not going to have any picnic with these fellows," said Swift.

"Bah!" sneered Gage, scornfully. "What does this work amount to! We'll jump on Merriwell and pound him to death in short order. He won't last three innings."

"Vot vos dot?" inquired a voice, and Hans Dunnerwust came waddling up. "Vot vos dot you heardt me say, ain'd id? Merrivell don'd last fife minutes, ur something uf dot sort? Vell, I pet me your roll dot he sdays in der pox der game oudt. Dot vos der kindt uf a hairbin I vos! Here vos my Unided Sdates currency, undt I vill pud der whole shooding match on him. Uf you has some money und sand, put ub und cofer dat."

Hans actually produced a roll of greenbacks, which he flourished excitedly around his head.

"Go away, you chump!" said Gage. "Don't you know betting is not allowed? You will get yourself into trouble, if you don't shut up."

"I'd peen more bleased uf you would put up, ain'd id?" said Hans.

The practice was soon over, and the plebes came in from the field.

Then Frank won the "toss," and sent his men first to the bat.

The regular team took the field. Gage sauntered into the box, and the game was about to begin.

CHAPTER XL.

THE GAME BEGINS.

The regular team had decided on the umpire, without letting the plebes have anything to say in the matter.

In fact, Leslie Gage had selected the umpire, without giving his companions an opportunity to express their desires.

He had chosen Watson Snell, a particular friend of his.

As Gage sauntered into the box, Snell broke the wrapper on a new Spalding ball, removed the tinfoil from about it, and tossed the snowy sphere to the pitcher.

Gage caught it with one hand, stooped and gathered up some moist dirt from the ground, and gave the ball a good rubbing with it, in this way quickly soiling its spotless cover.

"Striker up," called the umpire, sharply.

Barney Mulloy was swinging two heavy sticks round his head, so that one would seem light when its mate was dropped. He tossed one of them aside, and advanced to the plate.

"Don't try to kill the ball at the start," said Frank, softly, as the Irish lad passed on his way to the plate. "Do your best to hit safe for one bag."

"All roight, me b'y," was the reply. "Oi'll do as ye say, though Oi'd loike to break Gage's hearrut by puttin' the firrust wan over th' academy."

Leslie struck an attitude in the box, and then, like a flash, his hand cut several eccentric circles in the air, and the ball came whizzing toward the catcher.

Barney went after it, and he missed by at least six inches, for Gage had given the sphere a big "twist."

"One strike," called the umpire.

Gage smiled in a patronizing and pitying way, and then looked round on the spectators for signs of approval.

Barney grinned, as he lifted his bat and looked it all over, saying, loud enough to be distinctly heard in that vicinity:

"Begobs! Oi don't see nivver a hole in it."

The catcher returned the ball to Leslie, and Barney prepared for the next move.

As the first had been an out-curve, the Irish lad believed Gage would expect him to be looking for another of the same sort.

"Just let him give me an inshoot, an' Oi'll dhrop it over shortstop," thought Barney.

Once more Gage made those bewildering motions, and then delivered the ball.

It looked a trifle wild at the start, and it was speedy, so Barney was given little time for thought, but he knew it was just the kind of a ball the average pitcher would use if he wished to send an inshoot over the plate.

So Mulloy swung at it.

It was a lucky stroke, for the curve was exactly what Barney had counted on, and he did drop the ball just over the head of the shortstop, making an easy single.

"Wow!" shouted Hans Dunnerwust, unable to keep still. "Uf dot Irish poy don'd peen porn Irish, he vos a Dutchman, ain't id?"

Leslie looked disgusted.

"That was a clean case of luck," he thought. "I ought not to have cut the plate with that ball. Here-

after I'll trim the corners, and we'll see what the rest of those chumps will do."

Bart Hodge was the next man up.

He selected his stick with care, weighing and balancing it in his hands. As he went to the plate, Frank had a word for him:

"Advance Mulloy on a sacrifice," he said, quietly.

For one instant Bart felt like rebelling, for he believed he could hit safely, and it was his ambition to show up well in the game, as he desired to get onto the regular team. It seemed that Merriwell was making a needless sacrifice of him, and it was not his nature to endure anything like that.

But Bart was doing his best to overcome his natural inclinations, and he quickly choked back the words which rose to his lips. When he entered the batter's box he had made up his mind to obey Merriwell to the best of his ability.

Sammy Smiles now "opened up" on the coach line down near first, and the way he worked his chin quickly set the spectators laughing. Sammy was quick-witted and jolly, and in less than a minute he had demonstrated that he was one of the best coach-line choppers ever seen or heard at Fardale.

Frank had signaled Barney to get what lead he could and wait for a sacrifice.

Gage tried to hold the Irish lad close to first. He made three snap throws over to first, every one of them done in a different way, and each one came near catching Barney. Still the Irish lad continued to play off, knowing the necessity of having a good start on such a sacrifice, in order to prevent a double play.

A sacrifice under such conditions was something un-

usual, and, by many, would not be considered good ball playing, but it was because such a move was unusual and would not be expected that Merriwell had decided on it. Besides that, he had found out Hodge was a great "bunter," and a bunt sometimes counts more than a drive.

Having failed to catch Barney, Gage faced the batter a moment, and then, with no preliminary movements, delivered the ball.

It was an inshoot, intended to shave the inside corner of the plate.

Bart did not wait for the second ball.

The bunt was neatly done, and Barney went racing down to second, while Hodge did his best to get first, or to draw a throw.

The third baseman got in and gathered the ball in time to throw Bart out at first, but the bunt had been successful, and with one man out, the plebes had another man on second.

Gage looked more disgusted than before.

What were these fellows trying to do? They did not seem at all inclined to play ball after the established system, for they swung away or bunted at the first ball pitched, and advanced the first man up on a sacrifice.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans Dunnerwust. "Here comes dot pully poy mit a muscle as pig as a house! Just you votch Frankie knock der peelin' off dot pall bretty queek."

Merriwell had advanced to the plate, bat in hand.

"If he touches a ball, I'm a fool!" thought Gage, who was beginning to get angry in earnest.

"Whoop-ee!" squealed Sammy Smiles, as he stood on his head on the coach-line and cracked his heels together

in the air. "We'll have those fellows playing ball this end up in a minute—in a minute!" he repeated, with emphasis. "Wait till Merriwell hammers the leather! When did we ever strike such a snap as this?"

"Oh, close your face!" muttered Gage, fiercely. "You give me a pain!"

Sammy heard the words, and he instantly retorted:

"If I give you a pain now, you are liable to be in great distress before long."

This kind of talk was not allowable on the coach-line, so Frank silenced Sammy with a warning gesture.

"Can't I warble?" asked the little fellow, dolefully. "Am I a clam? Must I cease to chirp, and allow my vocal organs to become corroded?"

"You are not allowed to address the pitcher, or any of the opposite players, sir," said the umpire, severely. "If you offend in such a manner, I'll have to put you out of the game."

"What if the pitcher addressed me first? Can't I reply to a polite invitation to close my face?"

"I have warned you properly," said Wat Snell, ominously. "You must be careful."

"Somebody bring me a plaster!" chirped Sammy. "I want it to put over this hole in my face, for I'm bound to talk when a gentleman politely invites me to close the orifice."

Gage had learned that some of the opposite batters were dangerous, and so, after making another snap throw to hold Barney close to second, he gave Frank a "teaser." The ball passed at least four inches outside the plate, and so Frank did not offer at it.

"One strike," called the umpire.

Frank made a protest, but he was cut short, which

made him not a little angry, for he saw that it was a case of "playing ten men."

Gage took courage, for he saw that Snell was bound to show him every favor.

The next ball, however, was so far outside that Snell was forced to call it a ball. This was followed by one that made Frank leap out of the way, and two balls had been called.

George Harris was under the bat now, and as Walter Burrage had said, he was all right as a backstop. Up to this point he had not been called on to do any throwing, and the plebes were not aware that he was not a good thrower, and so Barney was taking no desperate chances.

But Gage seemed somewhat "rattled," as he threw yet another wild ball, which struck the ground a foot in front of the base.

"Three balls," decided the umpire, but his tone betrayed that he did so with the utmost reluctance.

It was now three and one, and Frank resolved to "take another." Gage must have suspected this, for he sent a swift, straight one fairly over the center of the plate.

"Two strikes," promptly rang out the umpire's voice.

It was now an even thing—or would have been with a square umpire. Frank, however, knew Snell was bound to give Gage the best of it, and so he determined to strike at the next one, if it came anywhere near the plate-range.

It was an out-curve, and it passed eight inches beyond the plate.

Passed?

Not much!

Frank had a long bat, and he swung at the ball, making calculations for the curve by reaching as far as possible.

Crack! Away sailed the ball.

"It's a corker!" shrieked Sammy Smiles. "Sprint, you snails—sprint!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE GAME WAXETH WARM.

A wild howl from the spectators drowned Sammy's falsetto, but he continued to shriek and wave his short arms till he grew purple in the face.

Barney Mulloy was a good runner, and he tore down the line to third like a race horse.

Ned Gray was on the coach-line near third, and he wildly waved his arms for Barney to make home, so the Irish lad cut as short as he could, and hustled in for the first score, crossing the plate on the jump.

By this time Merriwell was going down from first to second. He could not tell just what had become of the ball, which he had sent somewhere into the outfield, but depending entirely on the coaches, he kept straight on over second and ran for third.

The expression on Gray's face, together with his gestures, told that it was going to be a snug rub, and Frank strained every muscle.

The ball had been recovered and sent in from the outfield to short, while short whirled and threw to third to cut the runner off there.

It was a beautiful throw. The ball came on a dead line, and there was a sudden hush, for it seemed that the daring runner must die at third.

"Slide!" screamed Ned Gray—"slide! slide!"

So Frank threw himself forward and slid headlong, with his hand outstretched for the corner of the bag.

Spat! the ball struck in the third baseman's hands, and he reached to touch Merriwell.

Too late! Frank was lying there covered with dust, his hand on the bag.

"Safe at third," the umpire was forced to declare.

Then what a shout went up!

"Hurrah for Merriwell!" cried the spectators. "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"Vot I tolt you, don'd id?" cried Hans Dunnerwust, so delighted that he could not keep still. "You pet me my life dot poy vas a daisy! You don'd seen der peat uf him alretty yet!"

Leslie Gage seemed dazed. The third baseman tossed the ball to him, and he caught it mechanically. Then, with a sudden burst of rage, he jumped into the air and hurled the ball madly on the ground at his feet.

"Vot vas der madder mit dot feller, ain'd id?" roared Hans. "He don'd seem to feel so vell ash he mightd. Und he vos goin' to feel a greadt deal vorse pefore soon."

Leslie was furious. How Merriwell had obtained a three-bagger off him he could not understand. For some seconds he acted like a maniac, and one or two of the other players were forced to run in to calm him down.

While all this excitement was going on, Frank got quietly upon his feet and walked down toward the home-plate. He was half way from third to home before he was noticed, and then it was too late to stop him. With a merry laugh, he darted in and scored.

Then how the spectators did shout! It had been a long day since they had seen anything that delighted them so much.

Once more they cheered for Merriwell, and the entire

plebe team gathered to congratulate Frank. Hans rushed up and gave Frank a terrible thump between the shoulders, as he cried:

"Shimminy Gristmas! uf I efer seen der peat uf dot, you vos a liar!"

This stealing home was too much for Gage. He went into such a passion that it was some time before he could be calmed at all.

"What are we—a set of stiffs?" he cried, grinding his teeth and flinging off those who were trying to cool him down. "Are we going to let those plebes beat us easy?"

"What's the use to get so excited over it, old man!" said Roy Swift. "Merriwell is a heavy batter, and you can't expect to fool him every time."

"Oh, rats! He hit that by accident. He can't do it again in a thousand years!"

"Well, cool down, or you won't be able to pitch another ball to-day. You are too excited to go on now."

"Excited! Well, if that wasn't enough to make any one excited! Why, that ball was a foot beyond the plate! I want his bat measured. It must be four inches longer than regulation length."

"It is not, for I took care to measure it. It just reached the limit, and is not a quarter of an inch longer, so it cannot be barred."

"Well, if it can't be barred, it can be broken, and I'll find a way to see that it is. No more such accidents will happen this day, if I once get hold of that bat."

The umpire gave the regular team lots of time, and Gage gradually became calmer, for he realized that he must do so if he was going to stay in the box.

Sam Winslow was the next batter on the list.

Gage set his teeth. He could feel his entire body quiv-

ering, and he took plenty of time, gathering up dirt, rubbing the ball, and finding his position. The first ball he threw showed him he had entirely lost control, but still he hoped to get back in form in a few minutes.

Two balls were called, and then Winslow struck at a fairly good one, popping up a fly foul, which Harris easily "smothered," and two of the plebes were out.

This gave Gage more heart, and he settled down to business. With two men out and no one on bases, he succeeded in striking out Sammy Smiles, and the plebes were retired with two scores to their credit.

"Now we will get square with those fellows in great shape," said Leslie, as he came in from the box. "We'll make Merriwell regret he is alive. Every one of us wants to pound him."

Frank threw a few to Barney at first to warm up, being twice reminded by the umpire that the batter was at the plate.

Harvey Dare proved to be the first man on the batting list of the regular team.

Frank made no preliminary flourishes, but sent the first ball straight and fair over the plate, making it speedy.

As Frank had expected, Dare passed the first one, and stood with his bat poised, allowing the umpire to call a strike.

Following this, Merriwell sent in a couple of wide ones, and two balls were called.

Then he tossed up a slow drop, and Dare went after it with all his strength, striking over it at least a foot.

Hodge now came forward, adjusted the breast-protector and mask, and got under the bat.

Two strikes and two balls had been called.

Hodge gave the signal for an inshoot, and Frank put

on steam and cut the inside corner of the plate, but heard the umpire rob him of his due by calling a ball.

"I'll have to fool him on another drop," thought Frank. "That is the only way to get him to strike at it, and Snell does not mean to call a strike unless he is forced to do so."

So he gave Dare a drop, putting more speed into it than he did into the other ball. Bart had signaled for a straight ball, but Frank had signaled back that he was going to give a drop, so the catcher was ready for it when it suddenly seemed to shoot toward the ground just as Harvey Dare struck.

Whiz! the bat encountered nothing but empty air.

Plunk! the ball was held in Hodge's big glove.

"Three strikes; striker out," decided the umpire.

Then there was a great clapping of hands, and among those applauding, Frank saw Inza Burrage, Walter Burrage's pretty sister, the girl Merriwell had twice saved from death. His heart gave a leap, and the hot color came to his cheeks, while he mentally resolved to do his best, knowing how her admiring eyes were watching every move he made.

Dare walked away from the plate, his face and manner showing his deep disgust.

"What made you let him fool you on that simple drop?" demanded Gage, sharply. "You ought to have knocked the cover off the ball."

"Perhaps I ought," said Harvey, a bit sullenly; "but you know drops are my special weakness. I wonder how Merriwell found it out."

Swift was the second man up, and Gage urged him to do something. He said he would do his best; and that

proved of no consequence, for Merriwell struck him out also.

"You fellows make me sick!" said Gage, as he picked up a bat and started for the plate. "It's my turn now, and Ill show you what easy stuff Merriwell is."

CHAPTER XLII.

“BY FAIR MEANS OR FOUL!”

Gage was confident and determined; he meant business.

Hans Dunnerwust had heard Gage's remark that he would show what easy “stuff” Merriwell was, and he cried:

“Don'd you pelief me! I haf dot roll yet avile alretty, uf you vant to talk peesness.”

Leslie did not seem to hear this. He gripped the bat firmly, and fell into a correct batting position. He showed in his look and pose that he had no intention of striking out.

There was something about Gage's manner that seemed a challenge, and Frank was aroused to do his best. He resolved not to let the fellow have a safe hit, if he had skill enough to prevent it. He did not believe he could strike Gage out; that would be too much to expect; but he would keep him down as well as possible. At the same time, he knew he must make Leslie swing at the ball, for it was not likely Snell would call a strike on him unless he did.

“If I can get him mad, I'll have him,” thought Merriwell. “He won't want to take his base on balls, and he will try to line out a heavy one.”

This made Frank believe Gage would strike at the first ball delivered, in case the ball appeared to be a good one.

Bart signaled for an inshoot, but Frank signaled back

for an out-drop, and Bart nodded that he understood. Merriwell's signals were so skillfully given that the opposite side was not liable to detect them. They consisted entirely in the positions he assumed when about to deliver the ball.

Twining his long fingers round the ball, Frank suddenly delivered it, with a snapping motion of the wrist.

It started straight for Gage, but began a long sweep almost immediately after leaving the pitcher's hand.

Gage observed the sweep instantly, and he knew the ball must pass over the plate. He did not take into consideration the other movement imparted to it by the snap of the wrist.

With all his strength he struck at it, and the blow whirled him round and threw him off his feet, for his bat encountered no resistance beyond the empty air.

Bart Hodge seemed to dig the ball out of the dirt near one corner of the plate, for he was playing close under now, for all that there was not a runner on a base.

“One strike,” came from the umpire.

“Shimminy Gristmas!” gurgled Hans Dunnerwust. “Vot easy stuff dot Merriwell vos, ain'd it? You will see dot Leslie Gage knock der shdiffin' dot pall oudt bretty queek alretty—I don't t'ink!”

Gage picked himself up, looking mad enough to break something.

“I will hit it next time!” he grated, as he weighed the bat in his hands and looked it over, as if it had been responsible for his miss. “I was too eager to crack it then.”

But, for all of his muttered words, his confidence was

sorely shaken, for he had noted the wonderful manner in which the ball dropped.

Still he believed that Merriwell was nothing but a “drop-ball pitcher,” and one of the kind that could be hammered hard when batters “got on” to his delivery.

There was just the faintest ghost of a smile round the corners of Frank’s mouth, and that was more aggravating to Gage than a broad grin could have been.

“Oh, that plebe is a conceited whelp!” he thought.

He trembled once more with anger, and that made him far less likely to secure a safe hit.

Had he waited, it was probable that Snell would have found a way to call four balls, but he was so fierce to make a safe hit that he defeated himself.

Frank’s next ball looked like a straight one.

Gage struck again.

Once more he fanned the air, for he had counted on a straight ball or a drop, and it had proved to be a rise.

“Two strikes!”

The excitement was now at fever heat.

Merriwell had struck out the first two men up, and it seemed that he might serve the third man and heaviest batter on the team the same.

Sammy Smiles kept still with the greatest difficulty. The grin on his face was growing broader and broader till it seemed that he must explode in another moment.

Now Leslie Gage’s face was ashen white, and there was a wild and desperate look in his eyes. He gathered himself once more, and stood up to the plate feeling like a person with one chance in a hundred for life—with ninety-nine chances for death against him.

“I must hit it! I must hit it!” he kept repeating be-

neath his breath; but he was no longer fully confident that he could accomplish so much.

It did not occur to him then to hold back and give Snell a chance to call balls.

Frank Merriwell seemed preparing for a special effort.

Gage fully believed the plebe pitcher was about to try his most difficult combination of curves.

Whiz! the ball shot through the air.

Once more Gage struck, and, to his astonishment and disgust, he realized when it was too late that Merriwell had finally thrown a straight swift ball right over the inner corner of the plate.

And he had missed it!

"Three strikes—side out!" came from the umpire.

Merriwell had struck out three men in succession, and those three were the best batters of the regular team.

Gage turned away from the plate like one dazed. He did not rage and fume, for he was too stunned for that.

The crowd cheered, and Roy Swift was heard to say:

"That is the best exhibition of ball-pitching ever seen on this ground—it was great head-work and wonderful control. If Merriwell can keep that up, he is a wonder, and he will become our star pitcher."

Gage heard it, and every word seemed to smite him on a raw and bleeding wound. His heart swelled to bursting, almost, and things reeled around him. He staggered a bit, recovering himself quickly, flinging off the attack.

"Become their star pitcher, will he?" was his thought, as he reeled beyond the crowd that was cheering and shouting around the diamond. "Not if I live! I hate him as I never hated a human being before, and I will prevent him from getting on the team—by fair means or foul!"

The look on his face was simply murderous. It must have betrayed his thoughts had any one observed him then. All that was evil in the fellow's nature had been aroused, and he was ready for any black and treacherous deed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HODGE SHOWS HIS STUFF.

"Whoopee!" squealed the delighted Sammy Smiles, turning a series of handsprings, as Merriwell struck Gage out. "All down! Set 'em up on t'other alley! That beats!"

"Oi say, Merriwell," called Barney Mulloy; "don't ye mane to give th' rist av us a chance to do anything at all, at all?"

Hugh Bascomb was the only player who did not come in smiling. Bascomb looked disgusted, as he marched in from third.

"Oh, what are you making such a splurge about!" he muttered. "It was an accident. Merriwell will have a head bigger than a house if this keeps up."

He happened to approach Gage, and the eyes of the two lads met.

"What do you think of it?" said Bascomb. "Wasn't that great luck for the chump to have all in a streak?"

Gage knew that Bascomb disliked Merriwell heartily, and he also knew that the big third baseman for the plebes was not overburdened with scruples concerning the right and wrong of things.

"It's too much, Bascomb," he said, hoarsely. "Look here—a word with you."

He drew the big fellow aside, and they had their heads close together for a few moments. When this interview—which was very brief—ended, something was seen to pass from hand to hand, and they separated quickly.

Frank came in from the pitcher's box, laughing quietly.

"It won't be liable to happen again," he said, as if making a promise. "We need some luck at the start, so we will have courage."

Inza Burrage was so excited that she longed to hug Frank right there before them all, but she held her exuberance in check as much as possible.

Hodge was not robbed of all the honors, for Frank complimented him on his efficient back-stopping.

It is true that Hodge felt more than one thrill of jealousy as he heard the crowd cheering for Merriwell, but he had resolved to overcome this inclination in himself, and he forced it down, trying to feel as elated as any one.

"My back-stopping may be all right," he said, "but you haven't given me a chance to do anything else, old man. I'd like to try a throw to second to see if I can cut a runner off."

"You are liable to get chances enough before the game is over," assured Frank. "I am not going to strike out every man up, although I will confess I'd like to do so if I were able."

Gage took a drink of water, wet his temples and wrists, and then went down to the pitcher's box once more. The set of his jaw was like iron, and his face was pale as marble.

Was it possible that he, who had captained one of the leading amateur ball teams in the State, was going to be set aside for this plebe whom he hated?

Such humiliation would be too much to endure, and he had sworn to prevent it "by fair means or foul." Al-

ready he had taken steps. Would his ally be able to carry out the scheme successfully?

"If not, I will find some other way," he told himself. "That Merriwell shall not triumph over me!"

He was resolved to pitch for his life, and he started in to do so, for he struck out the first plebe to come to bat, which gave him new confidence.

"I'll get it back—I'll be all right," he thought. "With Merriwell out of the way, I need fear no one else."

The second man hit a skipping grounder to short. It was an elusive ball to handle, and the shortstop fumbled it just long enough for the batter to reach first.

This error made Gage angry again, and he shot a hot remark at the fellow who made it.

Frank Merriwell was now on the coach line near first, with Sammy Smiles over by third. Sammy opened up in his rattling way, while Frank talked directly to the runner, coaching the fellow to get a good lead. Gage threw over once, and then pitched the ball.

The next batter stood with his bat on his shoulder, as signaled to do by Frank, and took a called strike.

The runner had been instructed in advance, and he darted for second.

Then was shown the weak point on the regular team, for Harris made a bad throw, and the bag was stolen with ease.

This encouraged Frank to repeat the attempt, and he made two swift signals, one to the batter, and the other to the runner, both of which were observed and understood.

Gage, finding the base-runner was lively, made an attempt to keep him close to second, but all his tricks to

catch the fellow failed, and still the runner played off daringly.

Once again the batter stood with his bat uplifted and allowed a ball to pass, while the runner scudded for third.

And once again Harris made a poor throw, so the bag was obtained.

Frank had found out all he desired to know; bases could be stolen at will on Harris. He made a signal for the batter to line out a hit. But it was much easier to make a signal than it was to make the hit, for Gage had no idea that the batter would let another good one pass without striking, and so he began to send up "coaxers." Two of these the batter let pass, and then, growing too anxious, he struck at the third—missed it—was out.

Two men were out, and the plebes had a man on third. Gage resolved that the fellow on third should not score, and he did not, for the next man popped up a little fly to second base, and was caught out.

This was better, and Gage felt relieved as they walked in from the field.

"Now we must make some scores, boys," he said. "If we once fall on that fellow Merriwell, we'll hammer out a hundred without stopping. I believe he is fruit, but we must find out how to pick him."

The batter to follow Gage on the list was a good man, and the team depended on him for something.

Now it happened that Frank Merriwell, always generous, had resolved that Bart Hodge should have a show to exhibit his throwing and make known the fact that he was Harris' superior.

The first batter got a safe base hit, which did not

worry Frank at all, as it was an exhibition game, and he did not wish to carry off all the honors.

His only fear was that the coacher would not try to run the man for second, and, to give both courage, he did not pay much attention to first, allowing the fellow to get a good lead.

Then he threw a straight one for the benefit of Hodge, making it too far away for the batter to get without stepping on foul ground.

The runner made for second, and it seemed that he would steal the bag with ease.

Then Hodge showed the kind of stuff there was in him, for he caught the ball as a hungry dog snaps up a bone, and threw it with a short arm movement that did not seem to give him any effort at all.

Straight and sure as a bullet it flew to second, going from Hodge's shoulder down to the baseman's knees, which was the best place to catch a ball and put it onto a sliding man.

The runner had slid, but the baseman got the ball and tagged the player at least four feet from the base.

Then the spectators cheered for Hodge.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TIDE TURNS.

"Hurrah!" cried a village boy. "You fellows with the uniforms better take 'em off and give 'em to the other crowd! They can beat you with seven men!"

"Vot's der madder mit you?" came from Hans Dunnerwust. "You don'd know vot you vas dalking apoud, ain'd id? Don'd you know Leslie Cage was von uf dose vellars mit der uniforms on alretty yet? He don'd pe-lief nopody can peat him aroundt here."

"That was a beautiful throw, old man," said Frank, to Bart. "I don't believe they will steal more than a hundred bases on you to-day."

The next fellow lined out a long one, which was dropped by the left-fielder. But the runner did not try to steal second. He remained at first, and saw the next two men die without starting for a bag. The first popped a fly foul to Hodge, although the trick seemed impossible, and the last one struck out.

At the end of the second inning the score stood two to nothing, in favor of the plebes.

The regular team was thoroughly angry, but they protested that they were "just fooling with the plebes," and would come off with flying colors at the end.

This talk, however, did not fool anybody who was familiar with the game of baseball, as it was apparent that, up to that point, the regulars had been more than matched by the plebes.

And now, to Gage's dismay, he saw that the strong

end of the batting list came up against him, the plebes having struck round once in the two innings.

Mulloy was the first man to step up to the plate, and Mulloy was surely dangerous.

Gage resolved to be cool. He turned his back to the batter, and looked over the field, motioning quietly for two of the men to shift their positions somewhat.

Then he tossed his cap on the ground by his side, threw back his head, and turned about.

A second later, the first ball sped from his hand, gave a quick shoot in the air, and cut a corner of the plate.

"One strike," decided the umpire.

The next two were so wide that the umpire was forced to call them balls. Then came one that was on a level with Barney's eyes, but it was called a strike.

The Irish lad smiled scornfully. It was apparent that he was to be given very little show, and so, deciding that Gage would be likely to follow the high ball with a very low one, he prepared to swing at the next, if it was within reach.

Harris came up, adjusted the mask, and got under the bat.

As Barney had anticipated, the next ball was a low one. He "nailed" it.

Up, up into the air, and away flew the ball, while Barney struck out for first, the crowd shouting its encouragement and delight.

Gage's heart gave a great jump when Molloy struck the ball, and he turned to follow its flight with his eye. Then a feeling of intense satisfaction and relief came to him, for he saw he had moved one of the fielders to a position that was going to enable him to get under the

fly. If he had not moved the man, the ball must have passed beyond his reach.

The man got under it—caught it—held it!

"Batter is out," clearly rang the voice of the umpire.

Barney was already running for second, but he heard the decision and stopped promptly.

"Oh, keep on running," sneered Gage. "You may as well run round."

"Begobs! it wasn't your fault thot Oi didn't," quickly retorted Barney.

Hodge came next to bat.

"Soak it," advised Frank. "You sacrificed before; line it out this time."

Bart nodded. Then he came up and made an offer at the first ball pitched, as if he meant to bunt it to the ground just in front of the base, and try to "beat it out to first," as the catcher was playing back.

Bart had bunted before, and this second attempt made it seem as if the bunt was his particular trick.

Gage called in both outfielders and infielders.

Then he pitched a ball for Hodge to bunt, starting forward toward third-base line the moment the ball left his hand.

But Hodge did not bunt this time. The first offer had been made with the intention of deceiving, and it succeeded admirably.

He struck the ball fairly, and, with a good display of strength, sent it into the air on a line that carried it directly over the head of the shortstop.

This time Gage looked in vain for somebody to catch the ball, and Hodge did not stop till he was safely on third.

He had duplicated Merriwell's trick, and done it with ease.

Now the spectators actually began to make sport of Gage and the regular team.

Before going to bat, Merriwell stepped toward the water pail to get a drink.

Bascomb was just taking a drink, and he dipped up some water as Frank approached.

Gage's eyes glittered as he saw the big plebe pass the dipper to Merriwell.

"This game will soon turn the other way now," thought Leslie.

Frank drank, and then came to the bat.

Gage tried to dally with him by pitching "coaxers," but he lost control of one, and it happened to be near the corner of the base.

Frank struck it for one base, and Hodge scored.

Then Merriwell stole second, and took third on a wild throw from Harris.

But he did not get home, for the next two men went out, one on strikes and the other on a fly to short.

The score was now three to nothing.

"Holdt on, poys!" cried Hans Dunnerwust. "Vot for you vant to peat dose chaps so pad for, ain'd id? Uf you don'd let up alretty yet, dot pall glub vill disband."

Frank felt queer as he entered the box. His head was strangely light, and things around seemed a trifle blurred and hazy.

"I wonder what the matter can be?" he muttered, putting his hand to his head. "I never felt like this before."

Gage was watching his movements, and a smile of fierce satisfaction flitted across the face of the pitcher for the regular team.

"He will go to pieces this time, sure," he muttered. "I hope he will keep up long enough for us all to get a crack at him."

To the astonishment of almost everybody, Merriwell did seem to go to pieces, for the first man up hit safe, the next made two bags, and the third sacrificed so the man in advance came home.

The regulars had made their first score.

"Now, you fellows who have been having so much to say, just watch us pile up the runs," laughed Leslie Gage.

He advised everybody to "hammer the leather hard," and all seemed to take his advice, for hits were made right and left, and two more scores came in, making the game a tie at that point.

And still but one of the regulars was out.

There was a look of wonderment on Bart Hodge's face, for he could not understand what it meant. He was signaling to Frank for certain balls, but Merriwell paid very little heed to the signals, "crossing signs" more than once, and sending in a straight, easy ball the most of the time.

"What can be the matter with him?" thought Bart. "He seems to be out of it. I know something is wrong."

Then, with the ball in his hand, he walked down to speak to Frank.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Leslie Gage, exultantly. "We've got 'em chewing gum now, boys! This will be a regular cinch from now out."

"What is the matter, Frank?" asked Bart, anxiously. "You are giving those fellows everything they want."

"I know it," was the husky reply, as Merriwell stared at Hodge with hazy eyes. "I thought I would come

round in a few moments, and I did not want to leave the box, for I know they would say I was batted out; but I guess you'll have to put somebody—else—in—my——”

He pitched forward, and was kept from falling by Bart's supporting arms.

CHAPTER XLV.

HODGE EXPRESSES HIS MIND.

"What's happened?"

"Merriwell's hurt!"

"He's fainted!"

"Bring some water—quick!"

Then the crowd surged into the diamond and gathered about the two lads.

"Keep back, will you!" cried Bart Hodge, sharply, as he still supported Frank. "Don't crowd round us! Merriwell will be all right soon."

"But not soon enough to finish this game of ball," thought Leslie Gage, exultantly.

"What's the matter with him, anyway?" asked a voice.

"Oh, the hammering he was getting has made him ill," laughed Gage, sneeringly.

Hodge gave the fellow a black look.

"The hammering you are liable to get will make you sick," he flashed.

"What's that?"

Gage clenched his fists and started for Hodge, only to find his path blocked by Barney Mulloy, who said:

"Oi wouldn't bother th' b'y now, my hearty. Av it's anything ye want av thim, just look to me fer it."

"I wouldn't disgrace myself by getting into trouble with you!" sneered Gage.

"It would be a disgrace to yez, fer Oi'd bate th' face off yez, me darlint," chirped the Irish boy.

Leslie turned away, muttering fierce words.

Frank had not fainted, but his strength had left him, and things were going round and round.

"Help me off the ground," he whispered. "I think I must be ill. Perhaps I will come round all right later on."

Hodge's arm was about him, and Hodge's voice replied:

"There's something crooked about this, I'll bet my life! Come on, Frank."

The crowd parted for them to move along, and among those who watched them was a pretty girl with a pallid face, clasped hands, and wildly throbbing heart.

"Oh, it is so strange! What can it mean?" came from the lips of Inza Burrage.

Leslie Gage had sauntered toward her, and was near enough to hear her words. He knew of her friendship for Merriwell, and he longed to supplant Frank in her favor.

"Excuse me, Miss Burrage," he said, lifting his cap politely, and stepping forward; "I fancy I can tell what it means."

"Oh, can you, Mr. Gage? I hope it is nothing serious?"

"Nothing very serious, you may be sure," smiled Leslie, insinuatingly. "It is simply a case of flunk. Weak heart and weak knees. Merriwell was being batted too hard, and he lost his courage."

She gave him a look of surprise and indignation.

"It cannot be that you know Mr. Merriwell very well, sir," she said, severely. "He is the last person in the world to lose his courage. You should remember that he has twice saved me from death."

"I do remember that he has been thus fortunate," said

Gage, smoothly. "He is a very lucky dog, for he has won your esteem and friendship. Now, if I could have been thus fortunate—if I had been given the two opportunities to save you——"

"Could you have done so any better than Mr. Merriwell did?"

"Oh, I don't know as I could; but I should have been fortunate enough to win your regard, which I sincerely covet. But what has just happened must convince you that Merriwell is not what is known as a stayer, although he may do brave things by flashes. Look the way I had to take it the first of the game. I didn't give up, but I stuck to it. As soon as the tide turned and we fell on Merriwell, he weakened."

Inza was indignant.

"I refuse to believe that he weakened!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "He was taken ill—I am sure of it!"

Gage smiled indulgently.

"Merriwell is, indeed, fortunate in having such a friend as you," he said, "but I think you will find the most of the spectators will agree with me in thinking he weakened."

"I don't care a snap for that, and I think you ought to be ashamed to talk about him so! As a pitcher, he is your rival, and rivals should be generous. At least, they shouldn't say mean things behind each other's back."

"Excuse me, but I do not consider Merriwell my rival as a pitcher. I am the regular pitcher of the Fardale Academy team, and Merriwell is not in it at all. More than that, he has no chance of getting in. His pitiful exhibition of weakness to-day has spoiled his chance, if he ever had one. He is very fortunate to have such a warm friend in you, but that will not help his case with the boys who know him."

At this point the umpire called "play," and Gage excused himself, leaving Inza in an angry and doubtful mood. To save her life she could not help wondering if Frank had really been ill, or had "weakened" when he found himself batted hard, as Gage had claimed.

From the moment that Frank left the box, the game had little interest for her. In fact, it had lost its interest for the spectators, as the lad who took Merriwell's place was "easy," and the regular team immediately obtained a lead, which they easily held throughout the game, finally defeating the plebes by a score of nineteen to seven.

Merriwell had been taken to the hospital, but the physician there could not find that anything in particular was the matter with him, although his pulse was somewhat above normal.

Hans Dunnerwust, looking sad and disconsolate, hung about till it was reported that nothing serious was ailing Frank, and then he went back to see the remainder of the ball game. But he kept very still as he watched it out, and he took pains to get away before the last inning was finished.

"Dot Leslie Cage don'd haf a gread teal uf fun mit me, uf I can keep oudt uf his vay, you pet me my poots," he muttered.

Gage was smiling and triumphant at the close of the game.

"Of course we had to fool with those babies a little at the beginning of the game," he said, speaking loudly for Hodge to hear; "but we simply did so to give them courage. When we got ready, we sailed in and soaked it to 'em."

"Which you never could have done had Merriwell been

able to remain in the game," shot back Bart, who was boiling with suppressed wrath.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Leslie. "That must be intended for a joke! Why, we didn't do a thing but hammer Merriwell out of the box."

"You didn't hammer him out of the box, as you very well know. You did get a few hits off him; but he was so dizzy at the time that he could scarcely stand."

"Dizzy! Well, that is good! I don't wonder he was dizzy. The way we were pounding him was enough to make him dizzy. Why not own up that Merriwell found he was being batted, and flunked out?"

"Because it is not true. He is not the kind of a fellow to flunk, as you very well know."

"Well, he flunked to-day."

"You know better!"

"How do I know better?"

"Because I believe you know what really ailed him."

Hodge fastened his dark eyes accusingly on Gage, who showed some signs of nervousness.

"I don't understand what you mean," he said.

"Did you observe that the drinking dipper was missing immediately after Merriwell left the ground?" asked Bart.

"Why—ah—yes. I heard the fellows call for another dipper."

"Exactly. I took the other one, and I found something in it."

A bit of color left Leslie's face, while Bascomb, who had been listening, caught his breath and looked startled.

"Found something in it?" repeated Leslie Gage, questioningly. "What did you find?"

"I don't know yet what it is, but I mean to find out.

It was some sort of a white powder which did not entirely dissolve in the water."

Not a few of the boys were listening, and Hodge's words produced an immediate stir of excitement.

"A white powder?" cried Walter Burrage, pushing his way to the center of the group. "Why, it can't be that you mean to hint——"

"Can't it!" exclaimed Bart. "Well, I am allowed to think, I presume?"

"Of course; and you think—just what?"

"I think Frank Merriwell was drugged during the third inning!" declared Hodge, with his eyes fastened fairly on Leslie Gage.

CHAPTER XLVI.

GONE!

"Drugged?"

"Impossible!"

The exclamations came from Burrage and Swift. Leslie Gage forced a laugh, and said:

"That's rot. We fell onto Merriwell's delivery, and hammered him unmercifully, which made him weaken. Merriwell has wiped his feet on Hodge in the past, and now Hodge is ready to crawl for the fellow."

"Frank Merriwell has used me far better than I deserved," declared Bart, manfully. "I know he has enemies who would not hesitate to drug him. There are those who were naturally much concerned when he began to show up brilliantly as a pitcher, and——"

"Now, I presume you are making a thrust at me, Mr. Hodge!" blazed Gage. "If that is so, you have missed the mark, for I saw at the outset that he was a very ordinary pitcher—one who would go to pieces as soon as he was batted a little. He didn't worry me in the least. As soon as he saw we were onto him, he pretended he was ill, so that he might get out of the game. I'll bet he'll show up all right to-night."

"All the same, I propose to know what kind of stuff the white powder in the bottom of that dipper is," asserted Hodge.

"What do you suppose I care. I didn't have an opportunity to drug him, if I had been mean enough to do

such a thing, so I am not worried about anything you found in the dipper."

"You may not have had an opportunity, Mr. Gage, but I know there are others who dislike Merriwell quite as much as you do, and they would readily give you a helping hand."

Gage could endure no more.

"You have made too much talk, Hodge!" he flashed. "If you say I drugged him, or had anything to do with it, you are a liar! You are welcome to pick that up immediately."

This was fighting talk, and Lieutenant Gordan was seen approaching the group.

Hodge started for Gage, his hands clenched, and an ugly look on his face; but the cadets quickly closed between them, and held them apart, while Barney Mulloy said to Bart:

"Aisy, me laddybuck! Wait a bit, fer th' leftenant is comin' this woay. Ye'll have plinty av chances ter cram th' wurruds down th' throat av th' spalpane. Besoides thot, ye had best prove thot Merriwell wur drugged before ye do anything more. Thot will make yure soide popular, an' thot's what ye warnt."

Gage was easily pacified and drawn aside, so nothing further passed at that time between the two lads.

Bart immediately hurried to the hospital, where he found Frank on the point of leaving.

"Have you entirely recovered?" asked Hodge, anxiously.

"Nearly so," replied Frank, "although my head aches somewhat. What do you suppose ailed me, Bart?"

"You took a drink while we were at bat just before the attack came on."

"Yes, I believe I did."

"Did you do it yourself?"

"Yes—no. Let me see. Seems to me somebody handed it to me, but I don't remember who it was."

"I think I can tell you."

"Name him."

"Hugh Bascomb."

"Right; that was the fellow."

"I surmised as much, for Bascomb does not love you, and I have seen him talking with Gage several times lately."

"But, what if he did give me the water? You don't mean to say that you think——"

"You were drugged—yes."

A hard look came to Frank's usually pleasant face, and he said:

"I thought of that myself, but I didn't remember that Bascomb gave me the dipper of water, and so I put it aside, and decided that I had no cause to suspect anything of the sort. It doesn't seem possible, but still——"

"I am going to find out, for I have the dipper that you took the drink from, and it seems to have the remains of a white powder in the bottom."

"You have the dipper—where?"

"In our tent. After I helped you off the diamond, you know I left you suddenly. I went and got the dipper then, and carried it to the tent, getting back to the ground before play was called."

"Good for you, old man! If there is the remnant of a powder in the bottom of that dipper, we will find out what kind of a powder it is. If it proves that I was drugged——"

"What then?"

"Somebody shall suffer!"

"That's right, and you don't want to be too easy with the guilty ones, Merriwell. You are inclined to be altogether too easy. You could have kept me out of this academy if you had chosen, and it was no more than I deserved. The fellow who drugged you deserves expulsion, and he ought to receive it."

"He will receive something, don't worry," assured Frank. "Let's go to the tent, and have a look at that dipper and whatever is in the bottom of it."

Together they entered the confines of the camp, and proceeded directly to their tent.

Hans Dunnerwust was there, and he welcomed Frank joyously.

"Vell, uf I ain'd a sight for sore eyes, you vos a liar!" he cried, getting his meaning somewhat twisted. "I peen worrying yourself sick since dot affair at der pall groundt. Vot vos der madder mit you anyhow, ain'd id? Vos you caught mit a cramp your headt in, ur someding uf der sort?"

"I was taken ill."

"So vos I ven I seen you go oudt uf der pox. Shimminy Gristmas! dot vos too pad! I don'd ged ofer him for a week. I pet me your life you vos done dose fellers ub uf you hat sdaid in der pox. Dey vos lookin' sicker as eferyding w'en you vos daken off your bais und pegin to put der pall ofer der blate right where dey wanted 'em. Uf you don'd done dot, und you don't peen sick alretty yet, you peat dose poys oud uf sighd."

"How long have you been here?" asked Bart.

"Shust come in."

"There was no one around the tent when you entered?"

"Nein "

"Nine what?"

"Nottings. Dot vos 'no' in Sherman."

"I didn't know you could talk German," said Frank. "I thought you were a Dutchman."

"Vell, some dings in Sherman, und some dings in Dutch peen alike, ain'd id? Vot vos der madder mit you alretty? You don'd peen vell so queek as you pelief you vos."

"There's no one around," said Bart. "We'll take a look at that dipper now."

"That's right," nodded Frank. "Bring it out. We'll make Hans promise to keep still about it."

Bart advanced to his bed and felt beneath the mattress, while Frank waited for him to bring the dipper out. A look of surprise came to Hodge's face, as he continued to feel around with his hand. Suddenly he jumped up and rolled the mattress back.

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CHAPTER XLVII.

BASCOMB ASSERTS HIMSELF.

The game of ball between the regulars and the plebes created no little discussion.

Concerning Frank Merriwell, the boys seemed almost equally divided, some believing he had really been taken ill, and some believing he had feigned illness as an excuse to get out of the box when he found he was being batted hard.

All who were not prejudiced admitted that he had seemed to start in to pitch a wonderful game.

There were a few who held that the regulars had been fooling with him all along, but they either knew little about baseball, or were down on Merriwell to such an extent that they eagerly grasped at anything to injure him.

Hugh Bascomb discreetly kept silent, after having once expressed an opinion that Merriwell had proved "easy fruit" for the regulars, and found that his words were causing him to be regarded with keen attention and suspicion by some of Merriwell's friends.

Leslie Gage, however, was very free in expressing his utter contempt for Frank.

"Babies can bat him as soon as they drop to his delivery," asserted Gage.

"What made you let him get a three-bagger and a single off you in three innings?" asked one who overheard this remark. "If he can't pitch, you'll have to acknowledge he can do good stick-work."

"Oh, he got his three-bagger at the start off, and I

hadn't got down to work then; but both the three-bagger and the single were accidents."

"It looked to me as if they were accidents you could not avert."

"I don't care what you think; he couldn't do it again in a thousand years."

"But Hodge kept up his stick-work all through the game. How about that?"

"Did you fancy I was fool enough to wear my arm out on such a game as that? After we had those fellows dead to rights, I let up."

"That may be true, but there is one thing you cannot possibly deny. Hodge showed himself a first-class catcher."

In his heart Gage knew this well, and had he not disliked Hodge so thoroughly, and had not Hodge and Merriwell been such close friends, he would have acknowledged it. To himself he had acknowledged Hodge was far superior to Harris. It would be to his advantage to pitch to the better catcher, and he knew it, but his hatred for Bart kept him from saying so.

"He did very well with the pitchers he had to hold," Gage said, loftily, "but you must remember, my dear boy, that there is a great deal of difference in pitching. An ordinary pitcher sends in an easy ball for the catcher—one that is not rotating swiftly; a good pitcher sends in a ball that is whirling with amazing swiftness—a ball that glances from a bat, making pop flies, fouls, and scratch hits. Such a ball is ugly to hold, for it tries to twist out of the catcher's glove after he seems to have it fairly smothered. If Hodge had been back-stopping for some pitchers, he would not have shown up so well."

"But his throwing—that is certainly great."

"It is good," confessed Leslie, "but he might not do as well another time. You cannot judge a man's throwing by a single game of ball."

Sentiment, however, was strongly in favor of giving Hodge a trial on the regular team. If Bart had been at all popular, very few would have opposed him, but his quick temper and haughty ways had made him anything but a favorite among his cadet companions.

Although they endeavored not to betray the fact, both Bascomb and Gage were greatly worried. Hodge's declaration that he had taken a drink just before going into the box the last time, and that there appeared to be remnants of a white powder in the bottom of the dipper was enough to put them on the anxious seat.

They knew nothing, as yet, of the disappearance of the dipper from the place where Hodge had concealed it.

Leslie tried to induce Bascomb to make a trade with Hodge for the dipper.

"You do the business," he said, "and I will furnish the scads. Buy the thing at some price. Offer him fifty dollars for it."

"And I don't suppose you intend to show your hand in the matter at all?" questioned Bascomb.

"Why should I? You gave Merriwell the drug."

"And you gave it to me."

"Nobody knows that. Go ahead, Bascomb, and get that dipper some way. I'll make the governor cough up a hundred dollars, and you shall be well paid for getting the dipper and turning it over to me."

"You might pay me in money, and I might be expelled from Fardale. Oh, no, Gage; I am not going to play tool for you any more. I want to get hold of that dipper as much as you do. but I'll never say a word to Hodge.

unless you tackle him with me. We are both in this, and you must face the music, as well as I."

Leslie restrained his rage with a great effort.

"You're a bull-headed fellow, Bascomb," he said. "I didn't give Merriwell the drink, and everybody knows I had no opportunity to do so. I shall swear I had nothing whatever to do with it, in case I am rung into the affair, and you will have to paddle your own canoe."

"If I am exposed, I will own up to the whole truth, and you shall not escape."

Gage snapped his fingers.

"That for your threat!" he said. "Who stands the best in this school, you, who were known by several to be the leader in the affair for which Phil Haskins would have been expelled if he had not taken himself out of the academy, or I, who have been here somewhat longer than you, and have obtained a grip. My dear boy, if you blow on me, I will simply say that it is a case of spite—that, knowing Merriwell and I are not friends, you have tried to injure me. Nothing can be proved against me, and there you are. You will be expelled, and I'll stay."

As Bascomb listened to these cool words from his leader in wrong-doing, his face became drawn with rage, and a terrible look settled in his eyes. The cords on his thick neck stood out strongly, as if he were under a severe strain.

"So that's the way you'll work it, eh?" he said, hoarsely. "Well, let me tell you how I'll serve you. If I am expelled from this school, and you are not served the same, I'll lay for you till I catch you, and then I'll hammer you till you are so near dead that it will be hard to tell whether you have the breath of life in your body or not. That's what I will do to you, my friend!"

Gage fell back, fear and rage showing on his face.

"Why, you big brute!" he cried. "You wouldn't dare do such a thing!"

"Wouldn't I! You may find out differently, if occasion arises. And now I want to say right here that I do not fancy being called a big brute. If you ever do so again, I will give you a good thumping anyway."

It was plain that he meant it, and Leslie began to realize that he had formed an alliance with a fellow who might become exceedingly troublesome. He did not relish being talked to in such a manner, but he plainly saw it would not do to arouse Bascomb still more, and so he tried to soothe the fellow down.

"Come, come!" he said; "we are fools to quarrel. We can't afford to do so."

"That's right," nodded the big plebe, "and I am glad you realize it."

"I don't believe this business will be carried so far that either of us will be in danger of expulsion."

"I don't think it is best to have it carried that far."

"How can we prevent it?"

"By getting hold of that dipper, and making Hodge promise to keep still."

"Well, go ahead with the scheme."

"You must help me."

"How?"

"You proposed that the dipper be bought of Hodge, and that I do the buying. Now, I will tell you what we'll do. We will both go to Hodge, and try to get hold of the dipper some way."

"I won't do it."

"Yes, you will!" declared Bascomb, his manner growing dangerous and menacing. "If you refuse, I swear I

will give you a thumping now, and I'll tell why I was doing it, if you shout for help and call any one up. That is business, and I mean it."

It was useless for Leslie to bluster or beg. Bascomb was inexorable. The sycophant was a sycophant no longer; he was master of the situation.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SHADOW IN A HEART.

And so it came about that Bascomb and Gage followed Hodge about that evening, and finally caught him beyond the limits of the camp.

Hodge faced them quickly, demanding to know what they wanted. He was suspicious, and he did not fancy being dogged about.

"We want to see you on important business," said Bascomb, hoarsely. "Is that right, Gage?"

"That's right," admitted Leslie, feebly.

"Name your business," directed Bart, still suspicious.

"It's about—er—that—er—dipper," said the big plebe, falteringly. "Isn't it, Gage?"

"Yes," confessed Gage, reluctantly.

Bart was interested immediately, but he held himself in check.

"What about it?" he asked, with apparent indifference.

"Well, we didn't know but—but we could make some kind of a trade with you," blurted Bascomb. "You and I have been friends in the past, you know, and we have done some things we would not brag about. Now, I don't believe you are the kind of a fellow to do an old friend dirty when he is in trouble. If we have harmed Merriwell, we are sorry for it. Eh, Gage?"

"That's right," said Gage, thickly.

"And we are willing to pay you well to give up that dipper just as you found it."

Hodge was not a little surprised, for he had supposed

that, since the dipper's disappearance, it had fallen into the hands of Gage; but now it seemed that nothing of the kind had happened, and Bart wondered what could have become of the dipper.

"You are ready to buy it of me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then it is of value to you?"

"Possibly."

"It must be, and this is as good as a confession that Merriwell was actually drugged, and that you two fellows had a hand in drugging him."

"Never mind about that," put in Gage, with an attempt to appear superior. "All we want of you is the dipper."

"Well, you will not get it."

"We'll, pay you for it," Gage hastened to say, growing humble instantly. "We'll pay you well."

"That doesn't make any difference."

"You won't give it up?"

"I can't."

"Can't? What do you mean by that?"

"It has already passed out of my hands."

"Who has it—Merriwell?"

"No."

"Then you have given it to Old Gunn!"

Hodge said nothing in reply to this. He was willing for them to think he had surrendered the dipper to the head professor.

Bascomb grew furious.

"That was a dirty trick to play on an old friend, Hodge!" he cried. "You have done things in the past worse than giving a little harmless powder to a fellow. I could have turned you down long ago, if I had been mean enough."

"How did I know you gave it to Merriwell?" asked Bart. "I fancied Gage was the one who——"

"Gage produced the pow——"

"Stop!" gasped Leslie. "Be careful what you say!"

"Oh, what's the use! Hodge is the only one who can hear us, and we'll swear we never said a thing, if he reports it. He knows, and we can't fool him, but we can thump him, and I propose to do it right now."

He took a step toward Bart, as if he would strike the dark-haired boy; but, at this moment, another figure advanced out of the darkness, and the cool voice of Frank Merriwell was heard to say:

"Don't do it! You may get hurt if you do. I happened to be near enough to hear all that passed between you three, and so I know now that I was drugged, as I suspected before. I also know that Mr. Leslie Gage was at the bottom of the dirty trick, and I will lick him at any time or place he sees fit to meet me."

"But—but, if I refuse——"

"You can't. If you do, I will slap your face in the presence of your friends, and brand you as a sneak and a coward."

Frank was terribly angry, as his voice betrayed. It was a singular thing for Frank Merriwell to betray such feelings, but the outrage he had endured had aroused him thoroughly.

"All right," said Gage, recovering; "I will fight you. But I must be given a little time. A friend of mine will see you later."

"Why not arrange it right here? I have a friend present, and so have you. It will take but a few seconds to settle it."

This, however, did not suit Leslie at all. He did not

wish to be represented in a fight by such a fellow as Bascomb, and he did not want Bascomb to think that he objected to having him for a second, for the big plebe had an ugly temper, and he would be sure to "cut up."

Gage was desperate, for he saw that he had fallen into a bad trap. He had sworn to keep Merriwell off the ball team by fair means or foul, and the foul means he had resorted to had placed him in an ugly predicament.

Still Gage was not sorry. He hated Merriwell too much to regret anything. Now that he was being crowded to the wall, he felt that he could kill Merriwell without afterward feeling a pang of remorse.

He did not want to fight Frank with his fists, for he had seen Merriwell fight long before, and the plebe was a hard customer. Gage did not fancy being hammered.

But how could he escape? If he refused to fight, Merriwell would insult him publicly. There seemed no way out of the corner into which he had been forced.

"I'll have to meet him," thought Gage; "and I will do him up some way!"

So he got away as best he could, promising to send a friend to meet Hodge and make arrangements for the fight.

As Merriwell and Hodge sauntered away, the latter said:

"You must thump the face off that fellow, Frank, and then you ought to expose him to all the fellows present—tell them just what he has done. We've lost the dipper, it is true; but they do not know it, and their attempt to buy it from me was a dead give-away."

"I think it will be punishment enough to force Gage to give up his position on the ball team—to beat him out

fairly, and that I mean to do, if possible, if we are given one more day's practice with the regulars."

"Well," cried Hodge, "your ideas of getting square with a fellow are queer! That's all I have to say."

Frank waited in vain for Gage's friend to appear and make arrangements for the fight.

Still, Gage knew he could not get out of meeting Merriwell in some manner; but he had a scheme in his head. Since coming to the academy, Frank had taken up fencing, and he was following it assiduously, under the instructions of the regular fencing-master.

It happened that fencing was one of Gage's hobbies, and he was believed to be the match of any one in the school.

Believing Frank would be more than his match in a fist fight, and still hating him so intensely that he longed to do him some deep injury, Gage prepared to carry out a plot that he should have foreseen would rebound disastrously on his own head.

But Gage was so blinded by his rage and his hatred of Merriwell that he did not consider the possibilities of exposure in anything but the drugging affair.

It was on Monday afternoon that he saw Frank making for the gymnasium, where he took his fencing lessons regularly.

"Now's my time," thought Leslie, and he followed. "I'll fix him so he will no longer be a possible rival for my position on the ball team."

In the black shadow of his heart lurked a horrible, nameless thing that might soon be christened murder!

CHAPTER XLIX.

FOILED.

When Gage entered the gymnasium, he found Frank Merriwell preparing for a bout with Professor Rhynas, the instructor in athletics and fencing.

Leslie kept in the background till the lesson was fairly under way. Then he came forward and pretended to watch with interest, wearing a sneer on his face. Once or twice he laughed at Frank's execution of some particular stroke.

The professor gave a sharp look that was a warning, and Leslie remained silent till the final bout, when, instead of practicing certain moves, Merriwell was allowed to do his best to count on the instructor.

Then Leslie's sneers were more than ever apparent, and, at the conclusion, he said:

"You may be pretty smart at some things, Merriwell, but you'll never make a fencer. You are too bungling."

Professor Rhynas whirled on the speaker.

"I fancy you would find Mr. Merriwell quite a match for you, Mr. Gage," he said.

"Well, I wouldn't mind having a go with him."

"I do not care to meet you till another matter is settled," said Frank, quietly.

"I knew it!" cried Gage, scornfully. "You do not dare!"

"You will find me ready, when we have met in a different way, sir."

"That's all right, Merriwell; you play the bully first-

rate. I am no prize-fighter, but I am more than your match with the foils, as I would quickly show, if you had the nerve to meet me."

This was too much for Frank Merriwell, and he immediately said:

"Very well, sir; if you are so confident and insistent, I will meet you. But this affair shall not interfere in any way with the other."

"Oh, of course not," said Gage, aloud. But to himself he thought:

"I rather fancy it will interfere with the other affair. I'll fix you so you will not be able to meet me or play ball for some weeks to come."

Then he hastened to don mask, breastplate and gauntlet, after which he walked to the rack and, apparently, selected the first foil his eye fell upon.

¶ Ready for the contest, Frank was quietly waiting to meet his enemy.

Professor Rhynas seemed to scent something serious behind what was taking place. He had removed his mask, but stood with his foil in hand, ready to see that everything went off properly.

The lads faced each other.

"Gentlemen, salute," directed the professor.

Both made the salute, easily and gracefully.

"On guard, gentlemen."

Standing erect, with their right sides forward, heels touching and toes turned out, they extended the foils for the first movement, and then fell into the proper position for fencing.

"Fence."

The foils came together with a click that was followed

by a metallic gliding hiss, and the contest was fairly begun.

Before half a dozen movements had been made, Gage began to press Merriwell. He fought with a savage fierceness, as if the contest was for life or death, and there was a terrible expression in his eyes.

"Jove!" thought Frank. "He looks as if he longed to run me through the body! And he acts as if he intends to do so," was his additional thought, as Gage drove him back.

For a little Gage baffled himself, or seemed to do so, by his fierceness, for Merriwell counted three times swiftly, and each count was promptly acknowledged.

But that was of little consequence to Leslie Gage. He was not fencing for points.

He was after blood!

Lunge, parry, feint, thrust, riposte, advance, retreat—all this came about with a swiftness that would have been bewildering to any one who was not something of an expert at fencing.

The sharp eyes of Professor Rhynas followed every move. More than ever was he convinced that there was something serious behind this affair.

He was tempted to interfere, but it was so much like a real duel that he remained silent and fascinated, yet on the alert.

Suddenly a faint sound came from Gage's lips. It was like a muttered exclamation of exultation. Then he drove Frank back with the fierceness of an uncaged tiger, literally beating down his guard.

When it was too late to save himself, Frank made a startling discovery.

The button was gone from the point of Leslie's foil, and the point seemed to have been sharpened!

With this deadly weapon, having made a good opening, Gage lunged with all his strength at Merriwell's breast!

The passion of murder had seized upon Leslie Gage, for the weapon was certainly sharp enough to pierce the breastplate and Frank Merriwell's body.

Frank gave a cry of mingled anger and horror, but he could not escape by any act of his own.

But Professor Rhynas had discovered that the button was gone, and he lost no time in taking a hand.

He was barely soon enough to turn aside Leslie's murderous thrust. Then his foil seemed to curl around that held by the lad, and, with a twisting movement of his wrist, he tore it from the mad boy's hand, tossed it into the air, and caught it as it came down.

"What's this?" he cried, in astonishment, as he examined the point. "The button is gone! The foil has been ground down! Why, you would have run Merriwell through the body with that lunge! There is something crooked here!"

Gage turned pale, but it was from rage at having his desperate plot defeated, and not from fear.

"What's that?" he asked, innocently. "The button gone? How did that happen?"

"That's what I want to know," said the professor, gazing suspiciously at Leslie. "This did not happen by accident, sir."

"I should say not," admitted Gage, coolly. "Why, that foil must have been fixed in that way by somebody."

"It was; and what I want to know is, who fixed it? When I find out, that person is pretty sure to get fixed."

"Why, it is not my regular foil, anyway," said Leslie, in apparent surprise. "See—here is a mark that is like mine, but it is not the one I always use in taking my lessons. Somebody has played a trick on me!"

He rushed to the rack, and quickly turned about, with another foil in his hand.

"Here is mine!" he cried, returning to the professor's side. "See this—it is my mark. Some one marked the other one the same, and they must have fixed it that way. It was done to get me into trouble—I know it! I demand an investigation. The fellow who did this job should be punished."

"He shall be if he is discovered," assured the professor; but he still regarded Gage suspiciously. "Rest assured that the matter shall be investigated, sir."

Frank had said nothing up to this point, but he had been listening and watching his foe, a hard look on his face. He now observed:

"That was a close call for me. I have to thank you for my life, professor. I owe you that, but I owe Mr. Gage more, and I mean to square the larger debt first!"

Leslie tossed back his head.

"If you mean to insinuate——" he began.

"I shall make no insinuations without proof," said Merriwell, calmly. "But when I have proof, somebody shall be called to account."

Then he put aside his mask and foil, removed his breastplate and gauntlet, and left the gymnasium.

A few minutes later Leslie followed. His face was now very white, but his eyes still burned, and he muttered:

"Such beastly luck! But they can never prove I tampered with the foil, for I did that in the dead of the night, when nobody was watching. I had my trouble for nothing. Merriwell escaped this time, but I am bound to get the best of him in the end—by fair means or foul!"

CHAPTER L.

OVER BLACK BLUFF.

Hugh Bascomb met Gage as the latter was coming from the gymnasium. Making sure that no one was within hearing, Bascomb said:

"I have the dipper."

Gage gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Where did you get hold of it?" he asked.

"Oh, Furbush, the drum-boy orderly, saw Hodge secure it, followed him to his tent, and saw him hide it under the mattress. When Hodge left, Furbush secured it."

"Where is it now?"

"Safe."

"I want it."

"Well, you may have it; but it will cost you something."

"I'll pay for it, as I said."

"But it'll cost you more than the sum you named. You've got to come down handsomely."

Instantly Gage fired up.

"So you mean to bleed me, do you? Well, I refuse to be bled. Now that you have tried the trick, I refuse to pay a cent for it. You are in the same boat with me, and if one gets into trouble, the other must. You may do what you like with the dipper."

"You can't mean that? What if Old Gunn or Lieutenant Gordan gets hold of that dipper?"

"We may both be expelled; but you'll have to go if I

do. You have attempted to bully me lately, Bascomb, and I won't have it. You will find you have carried the matter altogether too far."

"Do you defy me?"

"Yes."

"I'll make you sorry!"

"Go ahead. That's as much as I care for you!" And Leslie snapped his fingers in the big plebe's face.

Bascomb was furious, but he dared do nothing then and there, so he could only glare after Gage and mutter, as Leslie walked haughtily away.

When Frank told his tent-mates of the little affair at the gymnasium, they became thoroughly enraged.

"If you let that fellow off without pushing him to the wall, you are foolish, Merriwell," cried Hodge.

"That's roight, me b'y," said Barney Mulloy. "Th' spalpane ought to be hung, so he had!"

"Dot hanging don'd peen too goot for him!" exclaimed Hans. "He ought to peen purned at der sdake!"

"I don't believe he means to fight me," said Frank. "I am going to wait a little while longer, and then I'll make another move."

"Oi'd nivver foight wid th' loikes av him. He'd wear brass knuckles, ur have a knoife in his slave."

"It is not necessary for you to fight him," said Bart. "The code of honor here will not require you to fight any one but a gentleman, and I am sure Gage does not come under that class."

"Well," smiled Frank, "we'll wait a while and see what we'll see."

Merriwell did not know that Gage was watching him constantly, as a cat watches a mouse it intends to devour.

On the day following the bout in the gymnasium, Frank obtained permission to leave camp. He proceeded to the old boathouse, where so many fights had taken place and so many plebes had been hazed, and there he secured a coil of rope. With this he made his way down the shore for a distance of more than a mile.

He finally came to a wild and rugged spot, where high cliffs rose directly from the water's edge at the lowest tides.

Frank made his way to the highest cliff of all, which was known as Black Bluff.

Half way down the face of Black Bluff was a rocky shelf, and on this shelf an eagle had made her nest.

Frank had discovered the nest of young eagles, and resolved to secure one of them to send to a boy friend at home.

He made one end of the rope fast to a tree that stood back a few yards from the edge of the bluff, and let the other end fall over.

It uncoiled and reached the ledge.

Next, Frank removed his coat and placed it under the rope at the edge of the cliff, so the rock would not wear it off.

Having made these preparations, he swung over the edge, and began the descent.

Far below the sea was rolling and roaring up against the base of the bluff, but he did not pause to look down there.

The eagle left her nest, and began to circle about, screaming her alarm.

Frank was about half way to the ledge, when he heard a shout from above. Looking upward, he was astonished

to see the face of Leslie Gage, who was peering down at him.

There was a fierce look of triumph on that face—a look that turned cold the blood of the boy who was dangling by that slender line against the face of Black Bluff.

“I have you now, Merriwell!” cried Gage, hoarsely and triumphantly. “You’ll never bother me after to-day!”

Then he held out his hand, and Frank saw it contained an open knife.

At that moment Frank Merriwell was numb with horror, for he fully understood his enemy’s murderous purpose.

Gage meant to cut the rope!

“It’s quite a little drop down there,” mocked the young villain above, “and I think it will fix you all right. I swore to get you out of my way by fair means or foul, and I am going to keep my word now.”

Then he started to cut the rope. To do so, he leaned a little farther over the edge, lost his balance, uttered a shriek of horror, and fell.

Clinging to the rope, Frank saw the dark form of his enemy shoot past and go whirling downward.

It seemed that he had been saved by the hand of Providence.

Gage struck on the ledge, and lay there, motionless, one leg hanging over the edge, his white face upturned to the sky.

“It is retribution!” thought Frank Merriwell.

For some moments he was too unnerved to do anything but cling to the rope. Finally, he recovered and continued the descent till the ledge was reached.

Gage lay there, white and ghastly, apparently dead.

Shuddering with horror, Frank drew his foe back from the brink, and then, unmindful of the screaming eagles and the young eaglets, proceeded to tie one end of the rope securely about Gage's waist.

When this was done, Frank summoned all his strength and determination, and climbed to the top of the bluff, where he rested a few minutes, and then drew Gage up.

From that spot he succeeded in carrying his unconscious foe back to the camp, although he was forced to rest many times in doing so.

Astonishing, and almost impossible though it seemed to Frank, Gage was not dead, although the doctor said he might be injured internally, so that he would not recover from the fall.

But the fellow was not even injured that much, although he was confined to the hospital for two weeks. It was one of those peculiar instances where a terrible fall is sustained without resulting fatally, or even breaking a bone.

But Leslie was in no condition to play ball when the day came for the game with Eaton.

Frank Merriwell filled Leslie's place, and Bartley Hodge supported him behind the bat.

The game resulted in a score of nine to three, in favor of Fardale, and, when the game was finished, every one but the "sore-heads" acknowledged that Fardale's battery was the best the academy had ever put into the field.

Burrage had captained the team through this game, but he immediately resigned in favor of Merriwell, who was accepted by acclamation.

"Phwat are ye goin' to do wid Gage whin he's well?" asked Barney.

"Vot vos dot?" put in Hans. "Vy, he shoost make for

him won lofely fight pefore soon and his face break, aind it?"

"No, no," said Frank, laughingly. "Gage has been punished enough. The score is settled. We will forget the foil business and all the other villainous things, and let him try to regain his prestige."

"Vich samé he nefer vill already," said Hans, excitedly.

"Not while Oi'm aloive!" cried Barney, putting up a brawny fist.

"Come," said Frank, "not one of us would hit a man when he's down. Gage is down in more senses than one, and I guess, Hans, you're right when you say his prestige is forever lost. But let's agree to treat the fellow decently, and not harbor enmity against him."

Hans shrugged his shoulders.

"Vell," he said, only half satisfied, "vot you say, Frankie, it vas as good as done."

"And you, Barney?"

"Me b'y, Oi am wid ye ivviry toime!"

"Hurrah!" cried Frank, delightedly; "we're at peace with all the world."

The three boys turned their faces once more toward the cadet camp at Fardale. Many struggles, temptations, defeats and triumphs were still in store for them, some of which will be related in the next volume of this series, entitled "Frank Merriwell's Chums." But for the present all went well, and so we bid them adieu.

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